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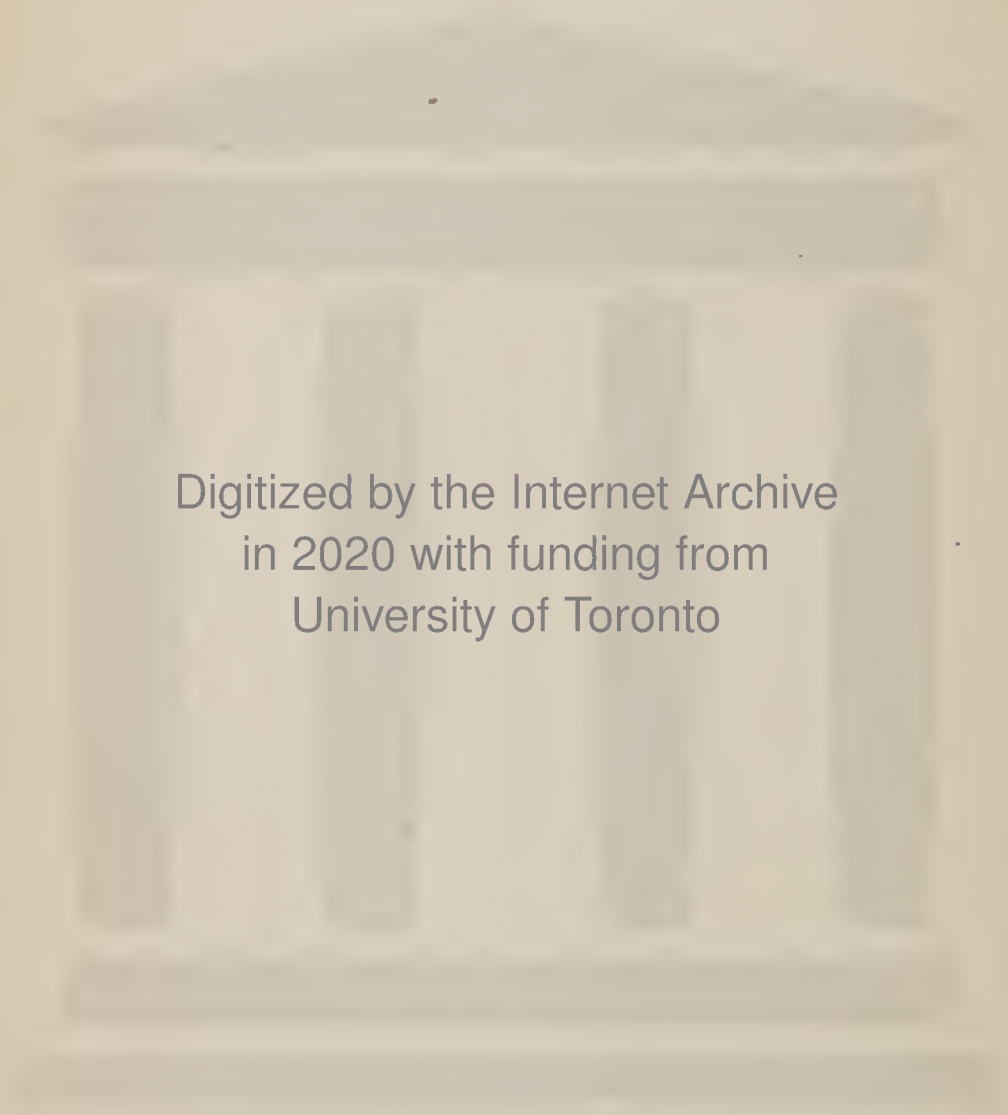
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A Novel.

BY

MAY AGNES FLEMING,

AUTHOR OF

"GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE," "A WONDERFUL WOMAN," "A TERRIBLE SECRET," "NORINE'S REVENGE," "A MAD MARRIAGE," "ONE NIGHT'S MYSTERY," ETC.

"She is too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise, and too little for a great praise; only this commendation I can afford her—that were she other than she is, she were unhandsome."—MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

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THE HEIR OF CHARLTON,

A Story of Shaddeck Light.

PART I.

"She is too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise, and too little for a great praise; only this commendation I can afford her—that were she other than she is, she were unhandsome."—MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

CHAPTER I.

SHADDECK LIGHT.

IT is very hot even for a July afternoon, and he has walked—if his lazy, graceful saunter can be called walking—fully two miles; so, coming upon a green spot, he throws himself down in the warm, sea-scented grass, pulls his hat over his eyes, and prepares to think it out. It is a good place for introspection; not a living thing anywhere, except now and then, a whirring seagull. At his feet a long stretch of silver-gray shore and sand dunes, beyond, until lost in the sky line, blue, limpid, lovely, sunlit, treacherous, the sea.

"She won't like it, that is a certainty to begin with;" so run his musings. "And if her mother finds it out, she will raise the devil. She is a personal friend of his infernal majesty, and raising him is the principal amusement of her life. I suppose it is in accordance with the eternal fitness of

things, that the more charming a girl is, the more utterly detestable her mother must be."

He raises himself to shy a pebble at a sand-martin, hopping near. He is a slender, well-dressed, well-looking young fellow, blonde as to hair and complexion, and wearing, quite honestly and naturally, the listless look of a man bored habitually by this wicked world, and the people in it.

"Let us see what she says." He pulls out a letter, after some search—a lady's letter, long, crossed, and in the usual angular hand. "'We leave on Tuesday next for the North,' yes, yes. 'Mother is delighted;' of course she is, mercenary old screw. 'Mr. Charlton speaks of his son, step-son rather,' hang Mr. Charlton's step-son. 'You must on *no* account follow me here.' Oh, but that's precious nonsense, you know, and after eight months' separation, and St. Ann's not three hours' ride from New York, and as good a place as any other to kill—" a great yawn cuts short the soliloquy, and exhausted by so much mental effort, the thinker closes his eyes, and, lulled by the warmth and the wash of the tide, lapses into gentle slumber.

He sleeps about half an hour, then he opens his eyes and looks about him. Presently his drowsy glance changes to a stare; he sits suddenly erect, struck by a peculiarity in the view.

During his brief "forty winks," a little island, about half a mile off, has changed as if by magic into a peninsula. No magic has been at work, however; the tide is on the ebb, and has dropped away from the rocky bar that connects it with the shore. On the small island stands a small house, and how the house comes to be there would surprise him a little if it were not too warm to wonder about anything. He half rises, with the momentary intention of testing the solidity of this new path which has risen like Aphrodite out of the ocean. But it is still sultry, and the sea-weed will probably wet his feet, and it is not worth while; so he

yawns again, and settles back on the grass. Come to think of it, how few things are worth while in this world. Even this trip of his down from the mountains, although the mountains in themselves are a delusion and a weariness—is it not a mistake? It will be pleasant to see his fair correspondent, doubly pleasant to outwit her mother, trebly pleasant to do something clandestine and wrong; but, after all——

The door of the small house on the islet opens, and a figure comes slipping and shambling over the rocks. He breaks off his train of thought to watch, with the same listless glance his handsome blue eyes casts upon everything, this ungainly new-comer. He draws nearer and stands disclosed—a long, lank, tow-headed, ill-favored, half-witted hobbledehoy. He stares stolidly for a moment out of a pair of "boiled eyes" at the gracefully indolent figure on the grass, then is shuffling on his way, when he finds himself accosted.

"I say! stop a moment. What do you call that?" He nods lazily towards the solitary cottage on the rocks, without moving. "It has a name, I suppose, and a use. What may they be?"

"That air," the lean youth responds in a nasal drawl, "that air is Shaddeck Light."

"What?"

"Shaddeck Light. Can't ye hear, mister?"

"Do you mean it is a light-house—that you live there and keep it?"

He has no particular object in putting these questions beyond the one object of his life, to kill his great enemy, time.

"Mostly, boss; me an' the cap'n, when he's to hum."

"Who is the captain?"

A light comes into the dull eyes, a flash of intelligence into the stolid face.

"Reckon you're a stranger reound here, mister, or you

wouldn't ask that. Captain Dick, I guess there ain't many folks reound Shaddeck Bay don't know Cap'n Dick Ffrench."

Up to this point the questions have been asked with languid indifference. But as this name is uttered the young man sits erect, and his blue eyes kindle into swift eager interest.

"Ffrench?" he repeats, sharply—"Captain Ffrench?—son and heir of Mr. Robert Charlton?"

"Wall, I reckon, mister, that's abeout it."

The interrogator pushes up his wide-awake, and takes a long stare at his companion.

"And you—you're Mr. Richard Ffrench, otherwise Captain Dick's factotum, I suppose? Like master, like man. Is Captain Dick there now, and at home to callers?"

He does not wait for an answer, but rises to his feet, flings some loose change to the lank lad, and starts at once for the bar.

"Durned if he ain't goin,'" the youth remarks. "Won't he spoil them swell boots though! City chap with store clothes. I see him yes'day a loafin' reound the hotel."

He picks up the pennies—the backsheesh is by no means princely—and plods along towards the town.

The shiny boots have reached the bar and pick their way lightly and carefully over sand, and sea-weed, and slippery rock. It requires some care to avoid stumbles and wet feet; but he does both, and stands, at the end of fifteen minutes, on the grassy slope of the little islet, upon which the small gray house perches solitary and wind-beaten, a mark for blistering summer suns, and beating wintry rains. It possesses two windows like port-holes, and a door; all three hospitably open to the cool and fresh sea-breeze. On the threshold he pauses. He sees a small room, the board floor scrubbed to spotless white, the walls glittering with whitewash, two or three easy-chairs, a comfortable-looking

lounge, a table littered with books, maps, manuscripts, newspapers, pens, pencils, and bristol-board, and sitting among the literary chaos, his back to the door, reading and smoking, a man.

"If that is you, Daddy," he says without turning round, "I will break your neck if you come in."

"It isn't Daddy," answers a quiet voice. "I suspect I waylaid Daddy about twenty minutes ago, and wrung from him the information that the master of this hermitage was at home. Idleness—the parent of all evil—suggested I should come. I have the pleasure, I think, of apologizing to Captain Dick."

He takes off his hat, and still with his afternoon languor upon him, leans against the door-post. The strong salt sea-wind stirs his fair hair which he wears rather long, a strong contrast in that respect to the gentleman he addresses, who is cropped within an inch of his well-shaped head. Indeed they are a contrast in other respects, for "Captain Dick," turning squarely round in surprise, rises, takes out his pipe and stands, a tall, broad-shouldered, sunburned young man, with a pair of fine gray eyes, under black, resolute brows, mind and muscle, brain and body, evidently equally well developed—quite unlike the slender, elegant, city stamped individual he confronts.

"Perhaps I ought to have sent my card by Daddy, with a request for permission, as one does when one visits a show place abroad," suggests the stranger, plaintively. "I really fear I intrude. You were reading, I perceive. I am Ernest Dane, trying to kill the dog-days, down here by the sad sea waves, and finding it consumedly slow. Most things *are* consumedly slow, if you observe. Don't let me interrupt; it isn't worth while. Being an inveterately lazy dog myself, I have the profoundest admiration for industry in others. We will meet again, I daresay. I stop at the St. Ann's. Until then!"

He replaces his panama and is turning to go, but Captain Dick interferes.

"No, no;" he says, laughing. "Visitors are rare birds in my rock-bound retreat, and to be treated as such. There is no hurry as far as the tide is concerned, and, like the tide, my industry is on the ebb. May I offer you a cigar?"

"Thanks, no; I don't smoke. Curious little den this of yours, but a capital place for hard cramming, I should say. You have rather the look of a hard thinker, by the by. Never think myself, if I can help it—one of my fixed principles. Wears a man out, I find, and there's nothing in life worth wearing out about. Do you mean to say you live here?"

"Not exactly, but most of my days, off and on, I spend in this shanty when I am down in these parts."

"Ah! not your nights, then. *That* must be a relief to your anxious relatives."

"My nights, as often as not, I spend drifting about the bay with my friends the fisher-folk;" responds the captain, good-humoredly. "I am an amphibious animal, I suppose; I thrive best in salt water."

Mr. Ernest Dane regards him with languid interest.

"Your days in study—Spanish, I perceive—and your nights in fishing. You never sleep if you can help it, I presume. But don't you find the everlasting swish-swash of the sea, down there in the rocks, rather maddening? 'What are the wild waves saying?' and so on, something of a drawback to close application?"

"I never hear it," answers Captain Ffrench. "With my pipe and my traps here, and my solitude, you behold in me, Mr. Dane, that *rara avis*, a perfectly happy man."

He stoops to gather up a quantity of papers and memoranda that have fallen, and replaces them with care. Order enters largely into the phrenological development of the student of Spanish, as may be noted by the perfect neatness

of everything in the bare little room. As he assorts his papers, his visitor rises and crosses suddenly to the chimney-piece, over which hangs the only picture on the walls. It is unframed; a head in colored chalks—a woman's head, of course; a low-browed, fair-faced, serene-eyed, smiling-mouthed woman; and underneath, in pencil, "Mademoiselle ——, New Orleans, May —, 1861."

Mr. Dane produces an eye-glass—his handsome blue eyes are short-sighted—and looks at this picture. Then he turns and looks at Captain Dick, a look so keen, so suspicious, so swift, so full of fire, that for one second it alters his whole expression. For one second only—when the other glances up from his manuscripts, the habitually negligent and indifferent air returns.

"A pretty face," he says, lightly. "You add artistic tendencies to your other virtues, I perceive. I don't know, of course, but it strikes me I have seen a face very like that somewhere."

"Very likely. I have a portfolio about in some corner, if you care for that sort of thing. Do you sketch? There are some rather good views here and there in the vicinity of St. Ann's and Shaddeck Bay."

"My dear fellow, I do nothing—nothing—absolutely and utterly nothing. I am ashamed of myself. I can recollect no time in which I was *not* ashamed of myself. I have suffered from chronic remorse for my laziness ever since I had a conscience. But all the same, I never reform. I don't suppose I ever shall. I don't sketch, I don't read, I don't smoke; I have no aims, no mission, no sphere. The world goes round and I go round with it. I drift with the tide, and am bound to no port. And, *apropos* of tides, the tide of our affairs will soon be the flood again, and our peninsula once more an island. So I think I'll make off. I see you have no boat here, so I conclude it is nothing unusual for you to be oceanbound."

"A boat is one of the necessities of my existence," Captain Dick says. "If you are going, I believe I will go also I am due at the house before six."

"Meaning by the house, the residence of the Honorable Robert Charlton?"

"Ah! you know. Yes, Mr. Charlton is my step-father; and, by the way, as he is the soul of hospitality, I think I may tender you an invitation in his name. You must find time hang rather heavily, I should say, at St. Ann's."

Yes, Mr. Dane admits with a gentle sigh. To find time hang heavily is, he regrets to say, one of the fixed conditions of his existence. It is the penalty, he supposes, life exacts from perfectly idle men. Very many thanks for Captain Dick's friendly offer, which at some future day, he hopes to avail himself of. Then he lifts his hat and turns towards St. Ann's while Captain Dick, whistling as he goes, gets over the ground with long strides, in a directly opposite course.

The sun is setting. The sea lies smooth and sparkling below, the sky spreads yellow, fleecy, rose-flushed above, the fields swell green and golden far away, the beach stretches white and glistening near.

Mr. Ernest Dane turns and watches his late companion out of sight, a stalwart, strong figure, clearly outlined against the western red light, with something unmistakably military in the square shoulders and upright poise of the head, something bright and breezy in air, and eye, and frankly ringing voice, something resolute and decided in the very echo of the firm, quick footsteps. Mr. Dane's face darkens, as he watches, and his handsome, bored, blonde countenance settles for a moment into as darkly earnest an expression as though he were a man with a purpose in life which that other man had crossed. It is but a moment. He turns away with a slight, contemptuous shrug, just as the tall captain wheels round a bend in the white road, and disappears.

CHAPTER II.

CHARLTON PLACE.

SHE is a handsome girl, and yet at first sight there are people who do not think so. It is the sort of face that owes nothing to bright coloring of hair or complexion, little to dress, and less to ornament. The hair is pale brown, absolutely without a tinge of warmer tint, either gold or russet, the complexion, clear and healthful, is colorless; the eyes like a fawn's, soft, thoughtful, peculiarly gentle; the mouth at once firm and sweet, the profile nearly perfect. Above middle height, with a figure well rounded and flexible, hands long, tapering, beautiful; dressed in black silk by no means new, but well-fitting, a touch of fine lace, and a coral pin at the throat—that is Eleanor Charlton.

She stands at the open window and looks out; a wonderful light of pleased admiration in the hazel eyes. Honeysuckle and sweet-smelling roses cluster all about the casement, and fill the sweet summer warmth with perfume. A sea of fluttering green leaves and brilliant flowers spreads out just beneath, and far beyond, with the hot, yellow blaze of the July sun upon it, another sea, all a-sparkle as if sown with stars.

"How pretty! how pretty!" she says, a smile of pleasure dawning on her lips; "how pretty it all is! How happy one might be—could be—in such a home as this."

The smile dies away, and a faint sigh comes instead. For all the home Miss Charlton knows, has known for the past eight years, is the hopeless home of a city boarding-house.

A breeze comes up from Shaddeck Bay and flutters the

honeysuckle bells, and swings the pink clusters of the roses. A bee staggers heavily by, drunk with sweets, booming drowsily. Little white-sailed boats glide about over the shining water, a door shuts somewhere in the sleepy afternoon stillness of the house. Then there is a tap, and before Miss Charlton has time to say come in, the tapper comes in and proves to be Mrs. Charlton's mamma, a lady of the fat and fifty order, with a hooked nose, a double chin, a thin, compressed mouth, a hard, cold eye, a false front, false teeth, a good deal of gold jewelry on hands and bosom—the well-preserved remains of a "fine woman."

"Eleanor," she says, abruptly, and turning the key in the door.

"Yes, mother."

Miss Charlton's voice is as gentle as her eyes, as sweet as her smile. Mrs. Charlton's, on the contrary, is of a rasping and astringent quality, that leaves an impression as bitters in the mouth.

"I wish to speak with you, seriously, my dear, v-e-r-y seriously," says Mrs. Charlton, taking a chair, folding her hands, and fixing her glimmering eyes on her daughter's face. "I have just been talking to Mr. Charlton, and he says—— Sit down."

She pushes a chair up, and Eleanor obeys. A look of weariness comes over her fair face, as if the ordeal of being "v-e-r-y seriously" spoken to, was no new one and no pleasant one.

"As I inferred from the first, my dear," begins Mrs. Charlton, with unction, "Mr. Charlton had a motive in sending for us to visit him, other than that he set forth. People may remember their deceased cousin's widow and orphan, and blood may be thicker than water; but, as a general thing, they don't send several hundred miles for these relatives to visit them, without some other motive than pure benevolence being on the cards. That something else I have discovered,

and its name is——" Mrs. Charlton pauses in triumphant expectation, and Miss Charlton smiles.

"Yes, mother, I know your perspicacity. It's name is——"

"Richard Caryl Ffrench."

Miss Charlton lifts her pretty eyebrows, but she is not surprised.

"Captain Ffrench—his step-son? Well, that is very natural, mother, only I don't perceive the connection. What have we to do, what has our coming to do, with this modern Sir Philip Sidney?"

"My dear, everything, *everything!*" Mrs. Charlton looks about her, glances out of the window, lowers her voice to a gunpowder-plot whisper, "Mark my words, Eleanor, Robert Charlton has sent for you with one purpose—only one—to marry you to Richard Ffrench."

"Mother!"

"It is perfectly true. He did not say so in so many words, of course. How could he? All the same, that is the hidden meaning of our invitation here. And, Eleanor, mind what I am saying, it is the best chance you have ever had, ever will have. I look to you not to thwart Mr. Charlton."

"But, mother——"

"You can raise no obstacle—none at all. When you dismissed Mr. Gore a year ago, you said he was notoriously dissipated, and I accepted that reason, although I failed to perceive then, and do still, what a little wildness in a man with a million can signify. But here it is different. Captain Ffrench, from what I can hear, is all the most exacting could desire; handsome, young, brave, clever—everything. I look to you, Eleanor, to do all you can to please Captain Ffrench."

"Oh! mother, mother, hush!" Her color has flushed, then faded; a look of pain, of shame contracts her brows; her hands lock and unlock nervously. "You are always dreaming, always talking, always hoping for this. Why

should Mr. Charlton have meant so absurd a thing? Captain Ffrench has no need to have a wife chosen for him, and thrown at his head. If he is all you say, is he likely to let any one choose for him? And besides——"

"Well, Eleanor, and besides?" says Mrs. Charlton, austerely; but Eleanor rises, biting her lip and flushing guiltily She goes back to the window, where the roses hang and the woodbine clambers, just as sweetly as half an hour ago, but the soft eyes are only full of impatient, impotent pain now.

"There can be no 'besides,'" says her mother, still more austerely. "And I have made no mistake in Mr. Charlton's meaning. It is not my habit to make mistakes. It is Mr. Charlton's wish that you should marry his step-son, who is a little, just a little, hair-brained about exploring and soldiering, and liable to run away at a moment's notice."

"And so is to have a wife tied to him as a sort of drag-anchor, whether he will or no. Well, mother, I decline being that drag-anchor."

"You will do exactly as you please, of course," retorts her mother, angrily; "as you always do. But, remember this, if you are perverse, if you take to riding any of your extremely high horses here, if you refuse the heir of this noble estate——"

"Mother, listen to me," Eleanor Charlton says, and puts her hand with a tired gesture to her head; "do not let us quarrel—oh! do not this very first day. What you hope for cannot be; there must be a mistake. You know—his letter of invitation said so—that he has also invited those two young ladies in New York, his distant relatives, as well as we——"

"That but confirms my suspicion, my certainty," interrupts her mother, calmly. "Richard Ffrench is to have his choice—all in the family. Very naturally this great fortune is to be kept with the Charlton blood, if possible, and in your veins and in theirs alone does it run. Richard Ffrench

is to choose between you. But you are first in the field, and to an impressionable young man fresh from wild Northern regions——"

"Mother, hush! I *cannot* bear it," Eleanor cries out "Oh! how many times have I listened to this; how many times have you not tried to sell me to the highest bidder. How many times have I not been shamed, shamed to the heart, by the looks men gave me, after talking to you. Let me alone, mother. I will work for you, I will give you all I earn, I will never complain; but for the sake of our common womanhood, do not make me blush again before the master and son of this house. And hear me once for all—I will work until I drop dead from work, I will lie down and die of starvation, before I marry any man for his money, and his money alone."

"Hush-h!" says Mrs. Charlton, "hush, for Heaven's sake!" There has been a rap at the door, now there is another. She smooths her angry face, rises, opens it, and sees a trim and smiling housemaid.

"Master's compliments, ma'am, and any time you and Miss Charlton is ready, he is waiting to show you through the grounds."

"Thank you," Mrs. Charlton responds, suavely. "Tell Mr. Charlton we will be down in one moment. Eleanor, my love, if you are quite ready we will not keep our kind host waiting."

* * * * * * *

The rose light of the sunset has faded out into opal and gray, the cool of evening has fallen upon the world, at white heat all day, when Richard Ffrench turns into the ponderous iron gateway, between its couchant lions, and goes up the long, leafy, tree-shaded drive. The old elms and hemlocks meet overhead, and make green gloom even at noonday. It is deepest twilight beneath their arching vault now. He emerges in front of the house, a large, quaint, red brick struc-

ture, set in a great slope of velvety turf and lawn, with wide halls, and bay-windows, and open doors. Brilliant beds of gladioli, geranium, verbena, heliotrope, and pansy crop up everywhere, and off yonder among a very thicket of roses he catches the sound of ladies' voices, the flutter of ladies skirts.

"Humph!" says Captain Dick, and stops in his whistling; "so they have come. I thought they would. I hope the governor—dear old woman-lover that he is—is happy at last."

An amused look is in the young man's gray eyes, as he stands and reconnoitres. The trio examine the floral beauties, unconscious of the mischievous gaze upon them.

"As if I didn't see through the transparent ruse—bless his innocent old soul—and as if they won't see through it too, before they are an hour in the house; I only hope the young lady has some sense of humor. And three of them, by George! I should think the Sultan of all the Turkeys must feel something as I will, when the last lot arrives."

Captain Dick throws back his head and laughs all by himself; a mellow, ringing, thoroughly joyous laugh. Then he turns to escape into the house, for it will not do, he thinks, to shock these delicate creatures with a rough jacket and a slouch hat, when Fate wills it otherwise. The trio turn suddenly, advance, see him, and retreat is cut off. He accepts defeat with calmness, and stands and waits. And as he waits his eyes widen, dilate, with surprise, for the face of the younger lady is the face in colored chalks over the mantel at Shaddeck Light.

CHAPTER III.

A FAIRY TALE.

"ONCE upon a time there was a king who lived in a lovely castle, and had two daughters. The oldest was ever so pretty, and her name was the Princess Snowflake. The youngest wasn't pretty at all, and her name was the Princess Brownskin."

The narrator pauses for breath. She is an extremely young lady, certainly not more than sixteen. The captious critic might perchance find fault with her grammar, particularly as she is a preceptress of youth ; but there are no captious critics present—only a very small boy and a smaller girl.

Twilight, the witching hour for fairy tales, fills the room. Rainy twilight, too, for the drops patter against the plate glass, driven by the sweep of summer wind.

"Well, after a long time this great, beautiful king died," there is a little touch of sadness in the fresh, clear voice ; "and the two poor little princesses were thrown all alone on the world. They went away from the lovely castle into the big, noisy, nasty, ugly, horrid city—— Flossy ! let pussy's tail alone. Lex ! I am watching you. You are falling asleep, sir, just as fast as you can fall."

"I ain't !" says Lex, indignantly ; "I hear every word. Was the horrid city New York, Vera ?"

"Oh, you stupid little boy ! as if there ever were any princesses in New York. No, this was in Fairyland. Well, and then these two princesses had to go to work as if they had never been princesses at all. The ugly little Princess Brownskin didn't mind it so much, because she only had to teach two little children, and that isn't hard, you know, but the poor pretty Princess Snowflake——"

"Vera," says Flossy, opening her baby eyes, "was the udly pwincess *you?*"

"There never was," says the young lady despairingly, "such a ridiculous small girl as you, Flossy! Of course not. Who ever said I was a princess. Well—where was I? Oh! at the Princess Snowflake. Lex, *you* are pulling pussy's tail now. I declare I won't tell another word. I'll get right up and light the gas."

But at this dismal threat both children set up a cry of misery that caused their stern monitress to relent.

"Vera, child," says an anxious voice. A door suddenly opens, and there is a rustle of silk. "Are you here? Oh, you are. I want you to go to Madame Lebrun's for me. What are you doing?"

"Telling Floss and Lex a fairy tale," answers the extremely young lady, laughing and rising from the hearth-rug, upon which she has been coiled. "Shall I light the gas, Mrs. Trafton?"

"Yes, please, and ring for Filomena—it is time those children were in the nursery. Lex, if you cry, sir, you shall be whipped."

"I want to hear about the pretty Princess Snowflake," pipes little Lex.

"Want hear about pwetty Pwincess Nofake," echoes little Flossy.

"Here, Filomena," says the lady, calmly, twitching her silk skirts from Lex's clinging fingers, "take those children upstairs directly. Vera, my dear, let nurse light the gas, you will strain your arms if you stretch up like that. Yes, I want you to go to madame's directly; she promised to send my dress home at five, and here it is after six, and not a sign of it yet. But it is exactly like her. You must go and try it on, please; our figures are so much alike she will be able to tell. I am sorry it rains," walking to the window and looking drearily out. "I would send the carriage, only

Mr. Trafton is so tiresome about taking out the horses in the wet. But you can take a stage——"

"Oh, I don't mind the rain," says Vera brightly; "I rather like it, in fact, with waterproof and rubbers, and I shall be glad to see Dot. I am to try on, and wait for alterations, if any are needed, I suppose, Mrs. Trafton?"

"Yes, my dear; and if you have to wait *very* long, make madame send some one back with you. Tiresome old thing! she never does finish anything when she promises."

The gas is lit now, and Lex and Flossy, wailing loudly for their lost princesses, are borne off by the French nurse. The pretty room, "curtained, and close, and warm," is known as the school-room, but in it there is more of Grimm's Goblins than of grammar, Hans Andersen than horn-books. Mrs. Trafton, a pale, faded, young woman, stands looking out at the fast falling rain, and in the middle of the room, directly under the chandelier, is Miss Vera. She is a girl of sixteen, and hardly looks that, with a soft cut, childish, innocent sort of face, a profusion of short, black hair, a pair of dark eyes that laugh frankly on all the world, and small, white teeth that flash forth merrily for very little provocation. She is thin and dark, too unformed and angular for good looks, but a bright brown fairy, and not in the slightest like any one's ideal of a governess. She looks as if she might very well go into the school-room herself for three or four years, and be the better for it.

She encases herself in a waterproof, crushes a little straw hat down on all her soft curls, and trips away as gayly as though it were a sunlit noonday. It is raining quite heavily, but she catches an omnibus at the corner, and goes rattling down town to the great dressmaking emporium on Fourteenth Street. The city lamps are lit, and shine through the wet drift of the rain. The pavements are greased with that slimy black mud, dear from long association, to the heart of the New Yorker. People hurry by with gloomy

faces under their umbrellas. Vera gets out at the corner of Fourteenth Street, unfurls her parachute, tiptoes with much distaste through the sticky mud, and up the steps of Madame Lebrun's establishment. A colored man in livery opens the door, and Miss Vera smiles a friendly smile of acquaintanceship.

"De do, Jackson? Dreadful sort of evening, isn't it? Is my sister in?"

"I presume so, Miss Vera. This way, Miss Vera, if you please; the reception-rooms are engaged. Step in here one moment, and I will inform Miss Lightwood."

The gentlemanly Jackson ushers her into a small room, and leaves her. She has to wait for some time, and is growing impatient, when the door quickly opens and her sister enters.

"Vera!" she exclaims, "Jackson told me—— Oh! here you are, I did not see you for a moment. Mrs. Trafton has sent for her ball-dress, I suppose? Well, she might have spared you the trouble, for it went five minutes before you came. But it is just as well, for if you had not come, I must have gone to see you. Vera, I have such news!"

She stops and clasps her hands, and looks at her sister with shining eyes. She is small, slight, and excessively pretty; a young woman, not a girl, with a pale, delicate face, a profusion of light hair elaborately "done," and set off by a knot of crimson silk. Her eyes are as blue as forget-me-nots, her complexion as milky white as a baby's. A beautiful little woman, but somehow looking every day of her six-and-twenty years.

Vera opens wide her black eyes.

"News, Dot? Where from? Who from? What about?"

"Look here!" Dot draws from her pocket a letter, and unfolds it triumphantly. "Do you see this letter? It came this morning, and that is why I meant to go and see you to-night. Vera, you never *could* guess whom it is from?"

"Never," says Vera, with an air of conviction; "I never guessed a riddle of any kind in my life. Who?"

"From Mr. Charlton—the Honorable Robert Charlton, of Charlton Place, St. Ann's," says Dot with unction, "and it is an invitation to both of us to go there and spend the summer. Both of us, Vera. He says expressly—where is the place—bring your half-sister, Miss Veronica, with you; I am sure the poor little thing must need a glimpse of green fields and blue water after her prolonged course of stony city streets. Come as soon as you can, and enclosed please find check for travelling expenses. Vera, how much do you suppose the check is for? Three—hundred—dollars!"

Vera snatches up her hat and waves it above her head. "Hooray! Your Mr. Charlton is a prince—long life to him! Three hundred dollars, green fields and blue——"

"Be quiet, Vera. Do, for pity's sake, get rid of your romping propensities before we go. Mr. Charlton evidently looks upon you as a little girl, and I am sure you act like one, and a hoidenish one at that. A young lady of sixteen past——"

"Oh, never mind that, Dot—don't scold. Read me some more of the letter—he does express himself so beautifully! 'Inclosed please find check for travelling expenses.' Could anything be more exquisite than *that?*"

"There is nothing else in particular," says Dot, folding it up and replacing it in her pocket. "He mentions that Mrs. Charlton and her daughter from New Orleans are also coming. He speaks casually, I believe, of his step-son Richard Ffrench, who has lately returned from somewhere—Lapland, or Greenland, or the North Pole."

"Lapland, Greenland, or the North Pole," sighs Vera, fanning herself with her hat, "how nice and cool they sound. I wonder Richard Ffrench didn't stay there. Mr

Charlton's step-son — um — is he his *only* son, his heir Dot?"

"I presume so," Dot answers, and a demure smile dimples her pretty face.

"It is a very lucky thing," says Vera, regarding her sister gravely, "that you are pretty. It would be a shame for two ugly girls to inflict themselves on one house, and a rich young man there too. It is not to be supposed that Richard Ffrench has left his heart's best affections with a Laplander, or a Greenlander, or a North Poler. And that dress is awfully becoming to you, Dot. Navy-blue, and dark red in the hair—— Dot, when are we going?"

"There is no need of delay. I told madame at once, and though she regrets, and so on, she has to consent. I shall use the money of course, and I see no reason why we should not start next week. Now, if you are going home, you had better go; it is getting late, and raining hard. Tell Mrs. Trafton—or, no. I will call to-morrow, and tell her myself, and then we can go down to Stewart's together for our things."

"To Stewart's together for our things," repeats Vera, in a sort of dreamy ecstasy; "it is lovely, it is heavenly, it is one of my fairy tales come true. The Princess Snowflake shall go to St. Ann's, and Prince Richard *Cœur de Lion* shall have the prettiest wife in all the world. Shall you wear white silk, or a travelling suit when you are married, Dot, and may I stay among the green fields and blue sea forever and ever? Yes, it is a fairy tale, with castle, and prince, and everything just as it ought to be. Shopping to-morrow at Stewart's! No, I cannot realize it. Good-night, Dot."

"Good-night, goose," laughs Dot, and sees her to the door. This little dark girl is the one thing in all the world that Theodora Lightwood loves.

Vera goes home through the wet, wind-beaten, mud splashed city streets, and the world is all rose-color, the pavements of crystal and jasper, the rayless night sky asnine with the light of hope. She is living a fairy tale; the enchanted palace awaits, the dashing Prince Charming is there, a long golden summer lies before——

"And the Princess Snowflake married Prince Richard, the Laplander," cries Vera, gleefully, giving wakeful Lex a rapturous hug, "and they lived happy forever after."

CHAPTER IV.

A MAN'S LETTER.

From Captain Richard Ffrench to Dr. Emil Englehart.

AND so, after a year in Baffin's Bay, a winter in St. Petersburg, after rinking with London belles, and after waltzing with Viennese beauties, without risk to wind or limb, you slip on an innoxious orange-peel in New York streets, and manage to sprain your ankle. Great is Allah, and wonderful are the ways of Emil Englehart! All the same, old boy, it must be no end of a bore to be tied up by the leg, just at this time when there is so much to be done about the expedition which nobody but you can do. As it is of no use crying over spilled milk, however, you may as well dry your eyes, cease your howls, put your snapped ankle under the nearest water-spout, and improve your mind during the next fortnight by reading hard at Spanish. I am getting on myself; I have a den out here in the 'vasty deep,' a little house about the size to hang from your watch-chain, perched on a rock, and in it I spend my days. My nights, when the moon is at the full, I devote to the toilers of the

sea. Such has been my life for the past six weeks; peaceful, virtuous, studious, monotonous; but, alas!

> "'Nothing can be as it has been before.
> Better so call it, only not the same.'

"A change is coming, *has* come; woman has entered my Eden, and the bliss of uninterrupted days of reading and drawing, of smoking peaceful calumets in the best parlor of the Manor House, o' evenings of dining in a pea-jacket, is at an end. If I threw the house out of the window, it would be good and admirable in the eyes of the dear old governor, but the delicate female mind, the sensitive female olfactories must be shocked by no deed of mine. Henceforward freedom is gone, and I return to the trammels of civilization and tail-coats.

"I have never told you about the governor, have I, nor how I come to have a home hereabouts? No, I don't think I have. We always found enough to do, and say, and think, without going into autobiography. But now the chained tiger is to be soothed, the sick surgeon to be charmed out of his loneliness. I am ordered, under penalty of bastinado and bow-string, to write long letters, amusing letters, and my lord, the Sultan, shall be obeyed. Long they shall be, amusing they may be, if you find yourself weakened intellectually, as well as physically, by your sprained ankle.

"Fourteen years ago, then, I went home one vacation from school, to find my mother transferred from her cottage to a handsome home, and to be introduced to a tall, spare, elderly gentleman, 'frosty but kindly,' as my new papa. I was about thirteen at the time, with very pronounced ideas on the subject of step-fathers, and, for the matter of that, on most other subjects.

"'You must be sure to call Mr. Charlton papa, Dick, my mother said to me, confidentially. 'You don't know how good he is, and how fond he is prepared to be of you. When

you are going to bed, to-night, you will go up to him very nicely and say, "Good-night, papa."

"I listened, committed myself to nothing, and revolved the matter all day. Bedtime came, I kissed my mother, who looked anxious, and went up to my new father, who sat beaming benignly upon me through his double-barrelled eye-glass.

"'Mr. Charlton,' I began, 'mother says you are my father, and I am to call you so. Now, that cannot be. No fellow can have two fathers, and I would rather not.'

"Dick!" my mother exclaimed, in dismay.

"'Never mind, Dick,' Mr. Charlton said, laughing; 'I like his honesty and his logic. So I am not to be adopted as father, Dick—what then is it to be?"

"'Thank you, sir. You were governor of a Western State some years ago, mother says, and if you wouldn't mind, I should like to call you governor. Lots of fellows I know, call their fathers that, regular out-and-out fathers, you know. May I, sir?'

"'Certainly, Dick. Governor let it be, by all means,' responded Mr. Charlton, still laughing, and so we shook hands, and that delicate matter was settled once and for all.

"I need not tell you what sort of father I found; no man could have loved his own son better. My poor mother died, and from that hour his affection seemed to redouble. All that I have, or am, I owe him. Men don't much talk or even think of this sort of thing, but the tie between us is one strong and deep. All the same, I am the plague of his life, my Arab propensity for folding my tent and silently stealing away, my Bohemian instincts when at home, are alike the bother of his existence. It came very near being a serious matter, last year, when I went with you all to the Polar Sea. The Honduras Expedition he will not even hear of, and that is why, principally, I have fitted up this Robinson Crusoe castle out in Shaddeck Bay, to keep my reading and sketch-

ing out of his sight. The place was formerly a sort of beacon for fishers and whalers, but long ago was deserted, and is as isolated as heart can wish. He wants me to take to one of the learned professions, his own for instance—law—and stay respectably at home. A man ought to settle, he says, at seven-and-twenty; and so he ought, I suppose, but there must be vagabond blood in me, for settling is the last thing I want to think of. I tried it once for six months, and grew restless and cross-grained as the devil. Since he came into the great Charlton fortune, his monomania for keeping me at home has grown to giant proportions. He has become rabid—a man of one idea, and that is why he has sent for—— but I have not come to that yet.

"It ought to be flattering, this rampant affection, and is, and I love the dear old fellow; still I cannot reconcile myself to the idea of ranging in this dull-as-death little country town, and settling down to turnips and prize pumpkins, short horns, steam plows, and top dressing, militia drill, and cider drinking. Ungrateful, I know, but as Dr. Watts remarks, 'it is my nature to.'

"Have you ever visited St. Ann's? It is about ninety miles from New York, and if ever the doctors send you to grass, turn you out to vegetate, not live, by all means come here. It is a finished town. Thirty years ago it stopped growing, and has never advanced an inch since. And for that very reason it is a charming place, with old homesteads embowered in trees, spreading orchards, golden and ruddy with fruit, old-fashioned gardens, where all sweet-smelling things run riot, yellow fields of waving grain, long, white, lonely roads, sleepy, Sunday stillness in perpetuity; and at its feet the everlasting sea, wash, wash, washing. And among its other products, Vestal virgins abound; the number of old maids is something pathetic. They muster strong on Sunday afternoons, up to the white meeting-house on the hill—one ceases to view polygamy as an evil, when one

watches them on their winding way, as faded and out of date as the bonnets they wear, with patient hands folded over unappropriated hearts.

"Once St. Ann's was a place of bustle and business, and sent out its fleet of whalers yearly, and in those days John Charlton made his fortune, built a house, died, and left all to his younger brother. When my day comes, I am told, I am to have it all, if, meantime, I behave myself, settle to law and monotony, marry a wife, and stay at home.

"Marry a wife! My dear Englehart, do you remember—I think you do—that girl who gave lessons at your sister's in New Orleans? A tall, Madonna-like maiden, a sort of human calla lily, with serene eyes, passionless and pure? Your little nieces called her mademoiselle, nothing but mademoiselle, just as they dubbed me 'Uncle Dick'—you remember? Well, she is here. Her name is Eleanor Charlton, and she is what a girl with such eyes should be. Her father was Mr. Charlton's cousin, once removed, and he has sent for her to come and spend the summer. Her mother is with her, a majestic matron; bland as sweet oil, but with an eye of stone, and a pair of cruelly tight lips. I see her daughter wince, sometimes, under that stony glance. They came three days ago, and I met them one evening in the grounds. There were mutual exclamations—'Mademoiselle!' 'Uncle Dick!' then a burst of laughter, a charming blush on the lady's part, explanations on the gentleman's, and an adjournment to dinner. After dinner there was music; she plays Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, this poor Miss Eleanor, who is a music-teacher by profession. I don't affect the piano-forte as a rule, but I like such playing as this. The violin came down after a little, and the governor beamed through his lenses, shone, scintillated, was radiant. Mrs. Charlton knows how to keep her dignified face in order, but I caught more than once, a 'Bless you my, children' look, out of the hard, austere eyes. As for mademoiselle—I like her, Englehart,

I always knew I should like her if I got a chance, and—I caught myself revolving, last night, the practicability of life on land, of tax-paying, land-draining, stock-breeding, horse-breaking, cradle-rocking, and all the rest of it. If any one could make it worth while, it would be this young woman. I know, and she knows, and we all know, what she is here for. Bless the governor! 'Take her, you dog, and be happy!' shines forth in every wrinkle of his dear, kindly, handsome old face. But she holds herself very far off, and I like her all the better for it. And I don't know. And don't you fill my place in the scientific corps yet awhile—

* * * * * * *

"I left off last night rather abruptly, and to-day the plot has thickened. I laugh by myself as I write. Two more have come this afternoon. I have not been presented yet, but look for that ceremony to-morrow. Young ladies of course, cousins again, but this time so very far removed that the cousinship will hardly do to swear by. Once upon a time, a Catherine Charlton—so runneth the legend—married a Southern planter, and the 'consekins of that manoovre,' to quote Sam Weller, was a daughter. This is the elder of the two. The Southern planter died, and in the fulness of time the widow wedded again, a Cuban, with a yard long pedigree and quantities of blue blood, and another daughter saw the light. These half-sisters are our new arrivals. Father and mother dead, wealth lost in civil war, earning their living in New York in the old weary ways, sewing and teaching. Oh! these poor little women who work! It is breaking butterflies, putting humming-birds in harness. My soul stirs with an infinite compassion for them all.

"Yesterday afternoon I went out with my henchman, Daddy, and drifted about on the high seas, lazy and happy, my mind a blank, my conscience at ease, my digestion at its best, until the red sun set, and the white moon rose, Daddy—not christened Daddy by his godfathers and god-

mothers in baptism, but yclept 'Daddy-long-legs,' by sundry small boys, for obvious reasons—Daddy took the oars in the gray of the evening and rowed me home. The house was all alight, the windows all open, music and woman's laughter floated out into the pleasant summer night. I stood under some trees and saw them all—a pretty picture. Dinner was over, the governor and Mrs. Charlton sat comfortably in a corner at cards. Miss Charlton was at a little table making something—point lace I think she calls it. She almost always wears black, which becomes her, and very few ornaments. She needs none, and knows it perhaps; the 'flower face,' the 'stilly tranquil manner,' the coils of silky chestnut hair—they are enough. She looked a household sprite, a fireside fairy, an angel of hearth and home, sitting there. I declare to you, the old strong instinct, older than original sin—'it is not good for man to be alone'—awoke within me for the first time. And then a shining vision came between me and her, something in white and blue, a stage fairy, with loose golden hair, and a waist like the stem of a wineglass. I looked for the other and saw a little girl, a bright brownie, with black eyes, and a real girl's bewitching laugh. Strange to say, I felt no desire to intrude my rough masculine presence among all that fair femininity. I stood, I gazed, I admired, for a while, and then I came up to my room. And here I am; and you, most puissant, enjoy the benefits of my passing misogyny. It is pleasant to have these young women in the house, it brightens things, and there is always Shaddeck Light when the sweetness begins to cloy. It is part of my coarse-grained nature, I suppose, but even as a boy I never had a taste for lollypops; and as a man, a little, a very little, of young ladies' society goes a great way. They so seldom have anything to say for themselves, and if they are pretty to look at, as they generally are, it is a pity to spoil the illusion. Miss Charlton can talk, but mostly she doesn't; I find her silent, and have a suspicion that she thinks, and

reads Ruskin and Stuart Mill. As for the others—one is a fluffy haired peri, and the second a dark fairy, 'too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise, and too little for a great praise!' Further particulars in my next.

"If there is anything I can do for you, old boy, command me. I can run up at any time, there is nothing to detain me. In spite of all the nonsense I have set down here, the Central American Expedition is very near this heart, and the sooner you get that dislocated limb in working order the better. I hope nothing will occur to postpone things; September will be a good month for the start. My one regret is, the vexation my going will be to the governor; but to stay here, idly pottering around, playing croquet, drinking afternoon tea, fiddling in time to the piano, driving about in basket carriages, and waiting for dead men's shoes—that way madness lies. Drop me a screed; a man may write with one ankle, may he not? And believe me, as ever,

"RICHARD CARYL FFRENCH."

CHAPTER V.

BEFORE BREAKFAST.

"IT is lovely," says Vera, "it is delicious, it is all my fancy painted it, it is the Castle of the Sleeping Beauty. And that reminds me, Dot, I wonder if the Sleeping Beauty is still asleep, or whether he came home at all last night!"

"Very uncivil of him in any case," responds Miss Lightwood, "not to put in an appearance even for one moment, knowing we were expected, too. Mrs. Charlton took care to impress upon me, with evident satisfaction, that it was his

very first absence since their arrival. But a little rudeness, more or less, what can it signify to two persons in our station in life?"

Miss Lightwood yawns sleepily as she says it, and turns over for another nap. She is in bed, and looks rather prettier there than out of it, certain fine lines of discontent that mar the expression of her waking hours, being effaced by slumber. Her cheeks flushed rose-pink, her fair hair all loose and damp, her blue eyes humid with drowsiness. She does not look as though last night's defection preyed upon her. Vera, always one of the earliest of early birds, stands at the window looking out over waving trees, rainbow pastures, velvet slopes of sward, as if she could never look her fill.

"After all, Dot, it must be a blessed thing to be rich, and have a home like this. Do be just as nice to Captain Ffrench when you meet him as you know how——"

But Dot is serenely asleep, and Vera takes her hat and makes her way down-stairs, and out of the house. It was almost dark last evening when they arrived, and in the bustle of welcome and dinner, and the first shyness of meeting perfectly unknown people in a perfectly unknown house, she has seen very little. But this morning it has broken upon her, a very dream of beauty. Her Southern home has faded into a hazy memory; for years the poor child has known nothing but the stony, unbeautiful city streets. And here are wildernesses of greenery, here are great stone urns ablaze with color, here are beds and beds of mignonette, of pansy, of geranium, here are thickets of roses, and trees of fuchsia, here are statues gleaming whitely, and gold and silver fish in mimic ponds. Over her head is rising the dazzling July sun, afar off she catches the flash of the sea, and smells its salt, strong sweetness—the sea that she has never looked upon but in pictures and dreams.

"Oh!" sighs Vera, in a rapture of gladness, "it is too

much. How will we ever go back to New York? Heaven must be like this."

She banishes the untimely thought of New York. She is sixteen, the summer is before her, Dot is pretty and Captain Ffrench is only mortal. Which is Captain Ffrench's window, she wonders, and is he sluggishly sleeping away this paradisiacal morning? It is joy enough to be alive on such a day. A thousand little birds are singing around her, the perfume of heliotrope and rose is everywhere, she breaks off sprays as she goes and makes a bouquet, singing without knowing that she sings:

> "'Alas! how easily things go wrong;
> A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,
> And there follows a mist and a sweeping rain,
> And life is never the same again.'"

Singularly inappropriate, but she gives no thought to what she is singing. Nothing could ever go wrong in this Eden. There would always be the birds, and the trees, and the flowers, and the sea—Oh! the sea! she must go *there* and look upon it for the first time.

She goes, and it breaks upon her with a sense of might and loveliness, that holds her silent and spell-bound.

"It is like a dream—like a dream!" she whispers, "Oh! you great, beautiful, fearful sea!" It is better after all, than the green loveliness of the land, and she goes on and down, until she stands where the shining baby waves creep up to her very feet. It is a sort of creek, and a boat is moored to a stake—a pretty boat, all white and blue, with a smiling, saucy face painted on the stern, and the name in gilt, The Nixie.

"Ah, yes," Vera says aloud, nodding to the Nixie, "you are very pretty, and very smiling, and very deceitful, just like the water itself—mermaids, and undines, and kelpies, and the rest of you fishy people always are. But I wish I could

go out in you, all the same, and have a sail before breakfast. I never had a sail in my life, before breakfast or after."

"*I* am going out," says a voice, "this is my boat. I will take you, if you like."

Vera looks around astonished. A man is standing on the bank above her, a young man, his hands in his pockets, calmly regarding her. She is not nervous, nor easily disconcerted as a rule—she is too much of a child—and she is not disconcerted now.

"Was I talking aloud? I didn't know it. What was I saying?"

He comes down the bank and proceeds to unmoor the boat.

"That you would like a sail before breakfast. I am going for a sail before breakfast, and I will be delighted if you will come."

The boat is unfastened now, the oars shipped, and he stands waiting. It is a strong temptation—how sunlit, dimpled, lovely, the water looks. And it is such a pretty boat. And it could not be much harm. And the woman who hesitates is proverbially lost. She lifts her dark child's eyes with all a child's frank fearlessness, and looks at him. He is good-looking, he has pleasant eyes, and a smile Vera likes. He looks like a gentleman. He holds out his hand. "Come," he says, and she goes.

"I wonder what Dot will say?" she thinks, "I wonder what Dot will do? It cannot be much harm to go for a sail. I wonder who he is?"

Of the world and its ways Vera knows nothing, absolutely nothing. She is as utterly ignorant of *les convenances* as though she were six instead of sixteen. This is entirely new, and beyond measure delightful, that is all she knows; it smacks of adventure, and there has been a dreary dearth of adventure in little Vera's life. And he is *very* good-looking, she observes, glancing sideways under her thick black

lashes—tall, and brown, and strong, with bright dark eyes, and a subtle smile. Subtle, in the sense that Vera does not quite understand it; he has rather the look of laughing at her, and she is prepared to resent it if she finds it so. He ought to say something; this silence is growing embarrassing. She leans over, as every heroine she ever read of does, and dips her fingers in the water. It is delightfully cool, and the summer morning clouds, like rolls of white wool, are reflected in the clear, green depths. Over yonder the sun, just risen, turns all the east crimson and flushes the girl's face with rosy gilded light.

"Oh!" she sighs aloud, "it is like being in a new world! It is like being born again. I never imagined anything like it. How delicious this breeze is, how salt it smells. How I wish Dot were here."

"Who is Dot?"

"My sister. What island is this? Oh, what a dear little house! And some one lives in it actually, out here in the middle of the ocean. Look at the smoke."

"I see. That is Shaddeck Light, and although a lighthouse no longer, some one lives there. I know the person, and if you like we will stop there before we go back."

"Will you though? I should like it of all things. Such a dot of a cottage; I once had a doll's house nearly as large. But it must be lonely, I should think. Who lives there, please?"

"Richard Ffrench."

"Richard Ffrench!—Rich—ard Ffrench!" Vera's brown eyes open in wide wonder. "Mr. Charlton's step-son? You never mean to say it is *that* Richard Ffrench?"

"Never heard of any other, and he is Mr. Charlton's step-son."

Vera regards him gravely for a moment. The sail has not been hoisted, he is pulling steadily against the tide, in long, strong strokes, as if he were enjoying himself.

"*You* know Richard Ffrench?"

"I have that honor."

"Captain Ffrench—he *is* a captain, is he not?"

"Captain once, captain always, I suppose. He commanded a company, I believe, during the late war. He is generally dubbed Captain Dick."

"Well, then, Captain Dick, being Mr. Charlton's son, should live at Charlton Place, should he not?"

"Naturally, if he were like any one else, which he is not. All half civilized people have barbarous instincts, and can never live in decent dwellings. Ffrench, for some such reason, spends most of his time here."

"What does he do?"

Captain Dick's acquaintance shrugs his shoulders.

"Who knows? He smokes a good deal, and loafs about among the fishermen. I have never heard that he does anything more useful."

"Is he there now?"

"Not likely. He goes home to sleep, as a general thing, though I have known him to spend nights at Shaddeck Light. Your interest does Captain Dick much honor."

"Well, you see," says Vera, nowise abashed, "I am down from the city to spend the summer at Charlton, and as I have not seen him yet, it is natural. One is always interested in the people one is to live with, you know."

"Undoubtedly. I heard that two young ladies had arrived by yesterday's late train. Such an event makes a stir in St. Ann's. But it is odd you have not seen Ffrench. I know he went home last night; I saw him go."

"He did not think it worth while coming to the drawing-room then. Very likely it is as Dot says——"

"What does Dot say?"

"Never mind," with dignity; "perhaps being half-civilized accounts for it."

"Or, perhaps he was afraid. Two lovely young ladies

are very formidable sort of people for one bashful man to encounter, single-handed and alone."

"Is Richard Ffrench bashful?"

"Painfully so. Depend upon it, he was afraid, and sneaked upstairs to bed."

"At all events," says Vera, resentfully, "he was not afraid of Miss Charlton. From what her mother said to Dora—to my sister—last night, he and Miss Eleanor have got on remarkably well. Not that it matters at all. Captain Ffrench's comings and goings can be of no consequence to Dot and me."

"Certainly not. Besides, he is going away almost directly, and a very good riddance I should say. A great hulking fellow like that is always a mistake in a household of young ladies. If *I* were in his place now——"

"Ah!" Vera says, mischievously, "if you only were! *You* are not bashful, are you? *You* wouldn't sneak up stairs to bed, would you!" Her joyous laugh rings out suddenly. "I don't believe one word you have been telling me. He isn't bashful, he isn't hulking, he isn't half-civilized, he doesn't sneak to his room. I know all about him, and I mean to like him. I like him already. He is a soldier, and I like soldiers; he is a hunter, and I love hunters; he is an explorer, and I ADORE explorers. Now what are you turning us round for? Are you going back?"

"We are going to visit the den of your lion. He is not there, and so we need not be bored by his roarings."

"But some one is, there he is now."

"That is only Daddy—the lion's keeper. Take care! let me help you. One jump—ah, capitally done! In Dick Ffrench's name I bid you welcome."

He throws open the house door, waves back curious, staring Daddy, and follows her in. Vera's quick, bright eyes dance over everything in a second, and pounce upon the picture on the chimney-piece.

"It is Eleanor!" she exclaims, "it is Miss Charlton!"

"Is it indeed?" says the young man. "Then Miss Charlton is a pretty girl. Will you sit down? Don't you smell coffee? Amuse yourself with the books, and I will go and get you some."

He goes. Vera watches him curiously. The coffee is a happy thought, it smells uncommonly good, and her water trip has made her painfully hungry. In two minutes she has turned over every article in the room—then her escort enters with a tray and a cup of the fragrant berry.

"I hope it is to your liking," he says, "and strong enough. What do you think of Ffrench's growlery?"

"I think *you* are very much at home in it," retorts Vera; "what do you suppose Captain Ffrench will say to this invasion?"

"Really I have not troubled myself to suppose. He ought to feel honored—*I* would in his place. I never envied any fellow before this morning. As to my being at home, I mostly am—everywhere."

So Vera thinks. His tall stature and broad shoulders seem to fill the little room. He partakes of no coffee himself—he obtains permission instead to light one of Captain Dick's pipes, two or three dozen of which are ranged on shelves. He sits on the door-step and smokes. The sun is high in the sky by this time, and the first crisp coolness is going off.

The seven o'clock bell rings in St. Ann's for the laborers. A few little boats float past on the rippleless tide. Soft, limpid waves wash over the pebbles, Sunday stillness is over all.

"It is heavenly!" says Vera, with a long-drawn breath. It is the third or fourth time this morning that she has made the same remark, but there is simply nothing else to be said. "I never spent such a morning, but I am ready to go now whenever you like."

Her companion rises.

"Yes," he says, "it will be as well not to let Ffrench catch us here, and I suppose he will be on hand shortly."

"Would he mind?"

"Well, he is something of a bear, but it is not that. Living in the same house he will see enough of you before long, while I—I wonder if I will ever see you again?"

"I don't see why not," replies straightforward Vera, "if you are Captain Ffrench's friend. St. Ann's and Charlton Place are not such an immensity apart."

"No. And if I come you will be glad to—— But there are three young ladies; I shall not know for whom to ask."

He says it innocently, and Vera does not see the malicious gray eyes that are laughing at her, under the straw hat.

"My name is Vera," she answers, in all good faith, "and —yes—I think I—shall be glad to see you. And I should like you to take Dot—to take my sister out as well, the next time. Her chest is not very strong, and it would do her good. Will you?"

"Only too happy, if Miss Dot will do me that honor. But I am not sanguine—you will forget me. Ffrench will monopolize you, the three of you. No one else will have a chance. You see I know that fellow."

"I thought you said he was bashful, mortally afraid of young ladies."

"Oh, well, that is only at first. It wears off, and then that sort of people are the worst—always in extremes. Bashful fools, or selfish beasts. And then, you know you like him, you love him, you adore him, and all the rest of it. No, I have no hope."

"Still I wouldn't despair too soon, if I were you," says Vera, smiling coquettishly, the instinct awakening in her as mouse-murder awakes in the playful kitten. "Come just

the same, and we will see. Two at a time, I should think, are as many as even Captain Dick can attend to. Here we are. I never enjoyed anything so much, and I am sure I am very much obliged to *you*."

"The enjoyment has been mine. Let me help you up the bank. Ah——"

The puzzling smile deepens into a laugh. Vera follows his eye, and sees coming toward them Mr. Charlton, her sister, and Eleanor. They are within the Charlton grounds; Vera's hat is off, she is swinging it by its rosy ribbons, all the soft silky curls are pushed off her warm forehead. Dora, in a pale blue morning dress, she notices with pleasure, is at her prettiest, Miss Charlton looks amused and surprised, and Mr. Charlton beams upon her as he draws near. Evidently she has not done wrong.

'What!" he says, "my little Vera, and abroad with the lark—*on* a lark, if I may say so. Your sister thought you were lost, but I knew better. And you look like a rose after it." (Vera's cheeks are as dully sallow as cheeks can well be.) "No need to introduce *you* to Dick, I see; he has done it himself. Dora, my dear, you have not met him—my son, Richard Ffrench. Dick, my boy, Miss Dora Lightwood."

And then it all flashes upon Vera—the deception, the shameful deception. He has drawn her out, he has taken her in, he has been laughing at her all the morning. It is Captain Dick himself, and no other. She turns upon him in a flame of wrath—yes, he is laughing at her even now.

"You—you are a *wretch!*" she cries, and turns and runs headlong into the house.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER BREAKFAST.

IT is two hours later, and the hall thermometer stands at ninety. There is not a breath stirring, the roses droop their sweet, heavy heads, the great beds of geranium and gladioli blaze in the yellow glare. The sea off there looks white and molten, the leaves of the trees hang motionless. It is the sultriest of July mornings, and Vera, coiled up on the marble of the wide hall floor, has laid aside her indignation for the present, as she has every superfluous article of dress. She proposes resuming both presently, when the day cools off a little, for she feels she has been disgracefully imposed upon, but at present it is too hot for dignity. The most ferocious Corsican in such a state of the atmosphere would be obliged to forego vendetta; so, though her enemy lounges within a yard of her, Vera is in too wilted a state for vengeance or reprisal.

Miss Charlton, in a white dress, a white rose in her hair, a magazine in her hand, looks cool and fresh as a rose herself. She is one of the fortunate few who *always* look cool; she is never flushed, nor heated, nor freckled, nor sunburned. She is trying to read, but breaks off with a smile to listen to Vera's girlish chatter, for, however warm this young person may be, she is seldom too warm to talk. Dora reclines on a lounge, languidly fanning herself and monopolizing Captain Ffrench. Mrs. Charlton is also present, her ponderous form filling a large wicker chair, her eyes half closed but all-seeing, silent but all-hearing, her tight lips sealed, her eyebrows contracted. She looks uncommonly like a fat family mouser with eye and paw sharpened, ready to pounce in one soundless leap on her victim. This irreverent comparison is

Dora's, who with pale, pretty face, slightly flushed, with blue eyes shining, with rosy lips dimpling, is, Mrs. Charlton feels a foeman worthy of her steel. In the door-way the bone of contention, the stalwart young heir presumptive, for whom all these fair women have donned plumes and war-paint, stands, his masculine vanity elate and tickled, immensely amused at the situation, and wondering if Abdul Aziz feels anything like this in the midst of the harem. Miss Lightwood is certainly doing her best, and Dora's best is pretty nearly perfect. According to her light, this young lady is conscientiously determined to do her duty—the very utmost she can do for herself and her sister. For Dora Lightwood forms no plans in which that gipsy sister does not share.

"I am a selfish little brute," Dora calmly admits, communing with her own heart. "I am mercenary, I am unscrupulous in a good many things, I have a horrid temper, I give my whole mind to my clothes, I hate people, as a general thing, but I love little Vera. I don't know why, I am sure. I never tried to, I never wanted to; loving any one is a mistake; all the same, I am awfully fond of Vera. And if a rich man proposed to me and made it a condition that I should part from Vera, why, I wouldn't marry him. I cannot say more than that."

She cannot. To refuse wealth for the sake of any human being is, in her eyes, the highest of all tests of love. As she lies here, in the "golden bower" of her fair floating hair, in her pale blue wrapper with its delicate trimmings, she is busily building castles in Spain—substantial castles, with a French cook in the kitchen, a French maid in my lady's chamber, three toilets per diem, a house uptown, near Central Park, a pew in a fashionable church, horses, carriages, black drivers in livery, and Charlton Place always, for at least three weeks every August, after Newport and the mountains have been "done." Somewhere in the background, faint and far off, is a tall young man of the muscular

Christianity order, ready to sign unlimited checks, and too much absorbed in scientific things, and explorations, and Hugh Miller's books, to push himself unbecomingly forward in the way of his wife's amusements. And Vera shall go to school for a year or two, to the most exclusive and extensive school whose portals greenbacks can unlock, and the child shall walk in silk attire, and currency have to spare. Then, when she is finished, they will make the grand tour—a winter in Paris, a Carnival and Easter in Rome, they will climb an Alp or two, and finish with a season in London——

"My dear Miss Lightwood," says the suave voice of Mrs. Charlton, "how many years is it—I really forget—since your father died? Ah! what a shock his death was to me. In youth we had been so intimate. Is it eighteen or twenty now?"

Dora awakes from her gorgeous dream. She looks across at her kinswoman, more cat-like than ever, with her contracted eyes and feline smile, and is ready for hostilities in half a second.

"Odd that you should forget, is it not, since you were such bosom friends? It is precisely nineteen years. Old Cat!" Dora says inwardly, "as if I didn't see your drift. I have kept big Dick Ffrench too long, have I, and your Eleanor is out in the cold."

"Ah!" Mrs. Charlton responds, her ample bust swelling with a fat sigh, "nineteen years. How time flies."

"Very true. That is an aphorism I have several times heard before."

"And you, dear child, you were—let me see—no, you could not have been twelve, because——"

The malicious eyes contract a trifle more as they transfix the audacious little flirt on the lounge. Captain Ffrench is out of his depth, but feels vaguely and alarmedly that this conversation is meant to be unpleasant.

"Because that would leave me at the present moment—I am the worst person at figures in the world—Captain Ffrench, nineteen and twelve, how much is that?"

"One-and-twenty, I should say, in your case," responds, gravely, Captain Ffrench.

"My father died, my dear Mrs. Charlton," says Dora, with a rippling smile, "nine—teen years ago. I was at the time seven years old, only seven, I assure you; the family Bible is still extant. Last birthday I was six-and-twenty. Six—and—twenty, fully two years older than Eleanor, I do believe. And then I lost my poor dear mamma so early. Things might have been so different if she had lived. It must be *so* nice to have a mamma to look out for one, to point out whom to be attentive to, and whom to avoid, in this deceitful world—to lay plans for one——"

"If one is not capable of laying plans for one's self—very true," says the other duellist, firing promptly. "A mother in many cases would be a superfluity. To be tossed about the world and learn one's own sharpness from hard experience ——I beg your pardon, Mr. Charlton, did you address me?"

"Would you not like to come out and visit the fernery?" says Captain Ffrench, hastily, in horrible alarm lest this bloodless battle shall be renewed, "or—or is it too warm?"

"Not in the least too warm," smiles Dora; "warmth is my element. Vera, hand me my sun-hat, please. Nelly, dear, what are your favorite flowers—I shall fetch you a bouquet."

She ties the broad tulle hat over the loose crinkling hair, the small, pretty face, and light blue eyes, gleaming with mirth and malice.

> "It's a very fine thing to be mother-in-law
> To a very magnificent three-tailed Bashaw,"

she sings under her breath as she goes, but Mrs. Charlton nears her and flashes a wrathful glance after her enemy. She

has been routed this bout, but hostilities have only commenced; she feels she is an old and able veteran, and they laugh best who laugh last. As she thinks it, Miss Lightwood's shrill peal comes back to her from out the blaze of sunshine into which she goes with Captain Dick. Dora's laugh is not her strong point, it is elfish and metallic, and does not harmonize at all with the rose-hued mouth and baby prettiness of face.

"That horrid old woman!" she exclaims, "did you ever hear anything so spiteful, Captain Ffrench? And all because *you* happened to be civil to me. Don't put on that innocent face, sir, and pretend you don't know."

"By George!" says Captain Dick, "how uncommonly flattering. I must endeavor to distribute my civility with more impartiality hereafter. You gave her as good as she brought, however, Miss Lightwood—that must be a soothing recollection."

"It is," answers Dora, setting her teeth viciously; "ever since I can remember I always hit hard." She doubles up her small fist instinctively, and Captain Ffrench eyes it with gravity.

"Yes," he says, "I should think a blow of that battering-ram would settle almost any sort of combatant. But, perhaps, it is morally, not physically, that you pitch into people. Moral whacks are so much easier to bear."

"Do you think so?" laughs Dora. "Judging by your exceedingly uncomfortable expression a few moments ago, I would never think it Honestly, it was in abominably bad taste this pugilistic encounter in your presence; but what was I to do? You heard yourself—it was she who began it."

"And was defeated with great slaughter! It was a perfectly fair fight, Miss Lightwood, and I rather enjoyed it. I bespeak the office of bottle-holder when the next match comes off. For I infer this contest for the——" He pauses and looks down; Dora looks up, and at the mutual

glance, so full of meaning, both explode into a frank laugh.

"Championship!" says Miss Lightwood, "for what else could it be? Oh! Captain Ffrench, conceit is the vice of your sex—beware of it. Is this the fernery? How cool and green it looks; and a fountain—is not the plash of the falling waters delicious? That reminds me—if I get up to-morrow, will you take me to your enchanted island, all unbeknown to Madame Charlton? Early rising is not my prominent virtue, but Vera painted the delights of her water excursion in such glowing colors, that I think it is worth one's morning nap—for once."

Captain Ffrench protests he will be only too blessed, too honored. In reality he is more or less bored. For the past half-hour he has been sighing inwardly for the sea-girt seclusion of Shaddeck Light, his books, and drawing-board. Not that he hasn't enjoyed the skirmish too, and the conversation of this piquant little woman of the world is spicy and novel. But enough is enough—of the first principles of flirtation he is absolutely ignorant; he has not had his after-breakfast smoke, he has not had his every-day, rain-or-shine, constitutional walk. He wonders what Eleanor is doing. How different she is from this pert (poor Dot's ready audacity is pertness in his eyes), forward, sharp-voiced little person, who talks so much vapid inanity. He can see Eleanor with her slightly bent head; her clear face, her large, sweet, serious eyes, thoughtful and a little sad. For there is always a touch of sadness about Eleanor—why, he wonders? Her mother nags her, no doubt; she is a hard old vixen, and can be deusedly unpleasant when she likes; but somehow he thinks the trouble lies deeper than that. She has to work hard, but she has the earnest nature of women who do not shirk work, who even find in work their greatest solace when life goes wrong.

"Poor girl," he thinks, and quite a new sensation stirs

somewhere within Captain Dick's broad chest. He is not the sort of man to fall too easily a victim to the tender passion, but if he were, and time, and propinquity, and a drowsy country-house given, a tall serene girl, with gentle voice and ways, all womanly sweetnesses and graces—— And then the shrill treble of Miss Lightwood breaks upon his dream, as her own was broken in upon a while ago, and claims him for the time as her own.

In the hall, Mr. Charlton, blandest, suavest of old time gentlemen and courteous hosts, entertains Mrs. Charlton with gossip about the neighborhood, and details of the fine old families, the Huntings, the Deerings, the Howells, of the old Puritan breed, who came over from Connecticut in 1650; and whose fathers made fortunes in the halcyon days from 1828 to 1845, when St. Ann's sent out her fleet of "blubber hunters," and dark-eyed foreign sailors reeled drunken about its quiet streets. Vera nestles near Eleanor's chair, and relates her adventure of the morning, at which Miss Charlton laughs.

"Was it not a horrid shame!" cries Vera, indignantly, "and I never suspected—no, not once—he kept such a virtuous and unconscious face. *He* knew that fellow! he was a bashful fool, and he sneaked upstairs to bed. Yes, very bashful, I should think; his modesty will prove fatal some day, if he doesn't take care!"

Eleanor laughs again.

"It was unpardonable—it was, really. I hope you did not commit yourself to any very awful extent, Vera?"

"I asked him a great many questions about Captain Ffrench, I know," says Vera, still hot and resentful, and seeing nothing to laugh at; "and he had not a good word to say of himself. I dare say he was right, it is a subject on which he ought to be informed. Still," with a sudden in consequent change of tone, "I think he is nice—don't you?"

"Very nice."

"And handsome?"

"Well—rather."

"And awfully clever? Now don't say you don't know, because it is patent to the dullest observer. He talks like a book—when he likes."

"Then he doesn't always like, for I have heard him when he talked more like Captain Dick Ffrench than Emerson or Carlyle."

"Ah! I don't know them. All the same, he is clever. He is a musician——"

"He plays the violin tolerably, as amateurs go."

"And he draws beautifully. And you needn't be so critical. He has your picture over the mantel at Shaddeck Light."

"Nonsense!" Eleanor's cheek flushes suddenly, and Mamma Charlton, with one ear bent to her host, the other turned to her daughter, pricks up the near one to catch more.

"It is there—nonsense or not—a crayon, as like you as two peas, flattered if anything. And there is a date. 'New Orleans, May, 1861.' So it seems, Miss Slyboots, you and Captain Dick are very old friends."

"Oh! no, no. I never spoke to him in my life until four days ago."

Vera's large, dark eyes lift and look at her. They are eyes of crystal clearness, the one beauty at present of her face, down through which you seem to see into the absolute white truth of a child's soul.

"I am telling you the truth, Vera," she says, her cheeks still hot, "though you look as if you doubted it. Some years ago I met Captain Ffrench at a house in New Orleans, where I gave music lessons. He came with an uncle of the children, and they adopted him as an uncle also. The mother was a French lady. To the children I was simply Mademoi-

selle he was Uncle Dick. But I never knew his name, neve spoke to him till I met him here."

Vera drops back on the marble. There is a shade of annoyance on Eleanor's face, as if half provoked at having this confession extorted. Her mother is listening, unctuous and well pleased.

"You evidently made a silent impression then," says Vera. "I said this morning, 'That is Miss Charlton's picture;' and *he* said, 'Then Miss Charlton is a very pretty girl.' Here comes Dot, alone; I wonder what she has done with him? Dot! Where have you left Captain Ffrench?"

"Am I my brother's keeper?" replies Dora, sauntering in, a great nosegay in her hand. "Here is your bouquet, Nelly. Captain Ffrench cut the flowers, and I arranged them. I am a milliner, you know, by profession, and have artistic tastes."

"Ever so many thanks—your taste is exquisite."

"But where is Captain Ffrench?" persists Vera, rising on her elbow, "you are responsible for him—he was last seen alive in your company. There is no old well out in the garden, is there, that you could drop him into, *à la* Lady Audley? And besides, he isn't a husband in the way——"

"Vera, dear," says Dora, sweetly, "you are horrifying Mrs. Charlton, with your wild talk of husbands. My sister —*she* is only sixteen—talks dreadful nonsense sometimes. Indeed, it is a family failing—not on the Charlton side, of course."

"But, Captain Dick—Captain Dick! what has become of Captain Dick?" reiterates Vera.

"He has gone to St. Ann's for letters," says Dora, resuming her place on the lounge. "As it stands about one hundred and fifty out in the sun, you may imagine how fascinating he finds your society, when he prefers to it a blazing three-mile walk. Now don't talk to me, please, I am going to take a nap."

Which she does almost at once, her mite of a hand under her rose-leaf cheek, sleeping as a baby sleeps, with softly parted lips.

"How pretty your sister is," Eleanor says, gently.

"Yes, is she not?" Vera answers, proudly, "and so much admired wherever she goes. People turn in the streets to look after her, and Madame Le Brun says she never had a forewoman half so popular before."

"You are not in the least like her."

"Oh! no, not in the least. I am the Ugly Duckling, you know. There is generally one in every hatching."

"And, like the Ugly Duckling, will turn by and by into a stately swan," says Eleanor, smiling down on the dark, thin face, with its great Murillo eyes.

"No," Vera says, shaking her head with a sigh, "such transformations are only in fairy tales and pantomimes. I am the Ugly Duckling and I shall never be the swan. But I don't mind. I would rather have Dot pretty than be pretty myself."

Here Mrs. Charlton rises, excuses herself, and sails away. Mr. Charlton departs to write letters in his study, Eleanor resumes her magazine, and Vera lapses into a day-dream, still coiled on the floor. The day-dream changes gradually into a real dream, in which she is floating over sunlit seas with Captain Dick, past fairy isles all dotted with small gray houses, until they finally, and rather unexpectedly, come to anchor somewhere in the upper part of Fifth Avenue, before Mrs. Trafton's front door. Captain Dick moors his craft to the brown-stone steps, and is going up to ring the bell, when——

"Three for the governor," says the pleasant voice of Captain Dick, in the flesh, "one for you, Miss Charlton, and half a dozen for myself. None for you, Miss Lightwood, none for you, Miss Vera, although I suppose it is rather soon for your five hundred to begin."

Vera rubs her eyes, and sits up. He hands Eleanor her letter, and Dora, who is also awake, sees with one quick keen glance, that the writing is a man's.

"I did not expect——" Eleanor begins in surprise. Then her voice falters, fails, she looks at the envelope, and grows pale. She lifts her eyes, and casts an anxious glance at Captain Dick, but his countenance is impassive. Her letter is postmarked St. Ann's, the chirography unmistakably masculine, but there is no curiosity in his face.

"I must deliver the governor's," he says, and goes. Miss Charlton rises slowly, and goes upstairs. Dora's eyes follow her. The surprise, the falter, the pallor, the postmark —Dora has seen all. Dora has eyes that see everything.

"Now I wonder what you are about?" muses Miss Lightwood, "and who our unwelcome correspondent is? Are you a fiery Southern lover come to guard your own, or are you a little bill?"

Little bills are the bane of Dora's life, but this is no dun. It is short and affectionate enough to establish the accuracy of Miss Lightwood's first guess. And it closes——

"I know you will resent my disobeying orders, but resent or not, I must see you. Do not be too hard on a poor devil, Nelly—it is eight months since we met. See you I simply *must*. I will be on the other side of the boundary wall (where Mr. Charlton's peach-trees flourish) about seven this evening. I will wait until nine, as I don't know the Charlton dinner hour. Do not fail. I expect a scolding, but a scolding from you, my darling, will be sweeter than words of honey from another. E. D."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE COOL OF THE EVENING.

DAY has passed, evening has begun. It is six o'clock, and the white quivering heat is spent, a breeze rises fresh from the Atlantic, flutters every lace curtain, and blows through every open window and door of the fine old Charlton Mansion. Over in St. Ann's the noises of the day are done; down in the warm-flushed west the sun —who has nobly done his duty all day, and baked the earth to powder—is sinking out of sight. The flowers lift their hanging heads, there is a rustle and a flutter through all the leafy trees, the birds chirp as they go to roost, and, revived by siesta and bath, the ladies of the household in the dusky seclusion of their chambers are robing for the great event of the day—of all our days—dinner.

"Dot," says Vera, tiptoing around, and straining her neck to get a view of the small of her back, where she wishes to plant a bow, "I am afraid it is of no use. I am afraid it is to be Eleanor."

"What is of no use?" asks Dora, for this remark has been made (like the generality of Vera's remarks) apropos of nothing. But she smiles too, as if she understood. Their rooms adjoin, the door of communication is open, and both are before their respective mirrors.

"About Captain Ffrench. Bother this sash! I can't get it to come straight. I think he must be falling in love with her, Dot. He has her picture, as I told you, over there in that funny little light-house, and he has a way of looking at her—— What are you laughing at?"

"At your perspicuity, dear, at your profound knowledge of the ways and manners of Richard Ffrench. This big,

solemn Dick who thinks we are all dying for him. So you are convinced I have no chance?"

"Well," says Vera reluctantly, "you see everything was in her favor. You did not have a fair start, Dot. Eleanor was here three days ahead, and a good deal can be done in three days——" Vera breaks off, for Dora is laughing immoderately. The simplicity, the earnestness of little Vera are too comical.

"Vera, child, you will be the death of me! Do you really think I have come down here to marry Dick Ffrench —if I can. What a humiliating idea. Not but that it would be worth while——" She glances wistfully out over lawn and garden, green glade, and dense shrubbery. "Yes, it would be worth while, and what I can—I will do."

"Worth while?" repeats Vera, "I should think so. It is like the Garden of Eden. Old Mr. Charlton must be awfully rich, Dot."

"A millionnaire, my child."

"Ah!" sighs Vera—a long-drawn sigh, "a millionnaire! What a rich, respectable, beautiful sound that has. And to be the step-daughter-in-law of a millionnaire, or even the half-sister of the step-daughter-in-law. What bliss!"

"Are you not getting things a little mixed?" Dora inquires, but Vera pays no attention. The bow is tied now, geometrically, on her spinal column, and she is leaning with folded arms on the sill, half out of the window. A great wisteria trails with its purple plumes all about the casement, and makes a setting for the black curly head and brown mignon face.

"There he is now!" she exclaims, involuntarily. Captain Dick perhaps hears, for he looks up. He takes off his hat, takes out his cigar, and puts on a penitent, an agonized expression.

"Am I forgiven?" he asks, imploringly. "If you only knew the day of misery I have passed, with a sin repented

of, but unpardoned, on my conscience! And the tocsin of the soul is about to sound—be merciful while there is yet time. How am I to consume lamb and mint sauce, withering under your displeasure?"

Dora does not catch Vera's shrilly indignant rejoinder—she is too far out of the window. The conscience-stricken one down below wears an aspect of desolation, and tries a second appeal, this time with more success. Vera is relenting, to judge from the softened tone of her voice—the remorse of the culprit is not without its effect. Then—"I wish you would come down," says Captain Dick, still mildly plaintive. "I haven't a soul to speak to, and I am never more alone than when alone. Come."

"Come into the garden, Maud," sings Vera; "it is more than you deserve, still——" There is a swish of silk, a waft of wood violet—Vera takes the last three stone steps with a jump, and is at Captain Ffrench's side.

Dora watches them with a well satisfied smile until they disappear.

"Yes," she thinks again. "It would be worth while. And then the satisfaction of out-manœuvring that old double-chinned witch of Endor. My age, indeed! The impertinence of trying to make me out thirty-one, in Dick Ffrench's presence. Eleanor is to be princess consort, and she is to reign monarch of all she surveys at Charlton. Ah, well!" Miss Lightwood nods to her own pretty face in the glass; "this is to be a drawn battle, and all I ask is a fair field and no favor. I will back myself to win against Eleanor Charlton any day, in spite of the picture in the lighthouse, and her three days' start in the race."

Miss Lightwood, looking very charming in one of the costumes purchased with the three hundred dollars, goes downstairs and finds her host and Mrs. and Miss Charlton already there. Vera and Captain Dick are still absent, but somewhere near, for Vera's joyous laugh comes every now

and then, mingled with the boom of Dick's mellow bass. Presently they appear, a sort of laurel crown adorning the Captain's hat, and Vera looking like a young Bacchante with clusters of trailing grape tendrils tangled in her dark, crisp hair.

"Let us crown ourselves with roses before they fade," quotes Captain Dick. "Miss Vera has given me brevet rank—the laurel wreath which posterity holds in store for me has been anticipated. Peace is restored, we have buried the hatchet, we have smoked the pipe—two or three pipes—of peace——"

"Speak for yourself!" retorts Vera. "*I* don't smoke, although I am half a Cuban. We have not kept you waiting, have we? It is all Captain Dick's fault."

Mrs. Charlton frowns. Vera is not the rose, but she grows near that dangerous flower. And whatever the heir's sentiments towards the elder sister may be, his liking for the younger has been patent from the first.

"How admirably Captain Ffrench and Vera get on," she says smilingly, as she goes into dinner with her host, and Mr. Charlton laughs in his genial way.

"Oh, yes," he says, "Dick was always remarkably fond of children. And she is really a bright little sprite."

"She is sixteen years old," says madam sharply, but the hint is lost. They are in the dining-room, and all other projects merge themselves in dinner. It is a large apartment, cool and airy, with a carpet like greenest moss, pictures of fruit and flowers on the tinted walls, sea-green silk and frosted lace curtains. The appointments, the silver, the glass, the courses are excellent. The Charlton cook may not be a *cordon bleu*, but she understands her art, and the result is eminently satisfactory. It is years, Dora thinks, with a deep sigh of complacency, since she has dined before. She has eaten to live—no more. Something of an epicure, in addition to her other virtues, is Miss Lightwood. Her

artistic taste takes in with real pleasure the snowy napery, the tall epergne of choice flowers, the ruby and amber tints of the wines.

Mr. Charlton is a very king of hosts, an ideal old time gentleman, genial and mellow as his own vintages, honoring all women with old time chivalry, and with an Arab's idea of the virtue of hospitality. Mrs. Charlton, in the place of honor, is paying unconscious compliments to the skill of his *chef*, and for the moment both eyes and attention are completely absorbed. Opposite sits Eleanor, whom Dora regards with considerable curiosity. She is paler than usual, she eats little, a more than ordinary troubled expression saddens the gentle eyes. By Dora's side is Captain Ffrench, and while he lends a careless ear to her gay sallies, she sees with inward rage, that his eyes wander perpetually to Eleanor. He, too, observes the cloud, but it never occurs to him to connect it with the letter of a few hours before. It is her nagging old mother, he thinks, who is fretting the poor girl to death. He is character reader enough to guess pretty clearly what sort of a Tartar Mrs. Charlton can be, when she likes. A great compassion fills him. In the love of some men, the element of pity is an absolute essential; the instinct of protection must be the kindler of the flame. Richard Ffrench is one of these. His passion is not very profound, perhaps, as yet, but if Eleanor Charlton were the most designing of coquettes, she could not advance her interests half so surely in any other way. As he sits here he would like to come between her and all life's troubles and toils, to shield her from work, and sorrow, and nagging, forevermore. And Dora's bright blue eyes read his face, and his thoughts, as he sits beside her, like a printed page. Indeed, less sharp orbs might, for the print is very large.

"Stupid idiot!" she thinks, "these big fellows, all brawn and muscle, are sure to be besotted about pensive, die-away damsels, and their lackadaisical airs. As if any one could

not see it was all put on with her dinner dress. She has studied him well enough, it seems, to know that the secret sorrow sort of thing is safe to go down."

Dessert is over, the ladies rise and go. There is British blood in the Charlton veins, and Mr. Charlton likes and honors the ancient custom of lingering over the walnuts and the wine, after his womankind depart. To-day he has a word or two besides for his step-son's private ear.

"Well, Dick," he says, "and how do you like them?"

He pushes the claret towards the younger man, who is abstemious by instinct, and prefers, even after dinner, a clear head to a muddled one. Captain Ffrench, peeling a peach, lifts his straight eyebrows.

"That goes without saying, does it not? A man can have but one opinion concerning three charming girls."

"Let us count out the dowager and the young one," says Mr. Charlton, good humoredly. "That little Lightwood is pretty as a rosebud."

"Prettier, I think," says Captain Dick.

"But Miss Charlton—ah! *there* is dignity, and beauty, and grace combined, if you like."

Richard Ffrench laughs lazily.

"The precise remark Mr. Vincent Crummles made when he first saw Mrs. Vincent Crummles standing on her head. I wonder who she takes it after?—Miss Charlton, I mean, —not Mrs. Vincent Crummles. Her father must have been rather a fine fellow, I should judge. A man may be a good fellow in the main, and yet write himself down an ass matrimonially."

Mr. Charlton chuckles.

"Hard on the dowager, Dick. Well! a great deal of her *would* be wearing, I dare say. But you must allow she is a remarkably well-preserved woman for her years."

"Both pickled and preserved, I should say, sir. You have no immediate intention then, I conclude, from your

dispassionate way of speaking, of inflicting upon me a step mother?"

"Hey!"

"Because I think her ideas run a little in that groove. Charlton is a fine place, and you are an uncommonly fine-looking elderly gentleman, governor."

This is carrying the war into Africa with a vengeance. Has Dick foreseen and forestalled his communication? For a moment he is nonplussed—then he laughs.

"Rubbish, Dick! Nothing so absurd could ever enter any head but one addled over 'Ollendorf's Spanish.' But, speaking of matrimony—what do you suppose I have brought those girls down here for?"

"It is plain to the dullest intelligence. To select, at your leisure, a mistress for Charlton, and a——"

"Wife for you. Exactly, Dick. Now which shall it be?"

"My dear governor!"

"Which? Eleanor you have known a week—knew long ago, in fact. And Dora you have seen enough of to ascer tain——"

"That she is an extremely charming girl, with whom I intend to have nothing to do! Let me offer you this dish of apricots, sir; they are nearly perfect."

"Then it is to be Miss Charlton? My dear boy; it is precisely what I would have wished. She is all any man could desire—well-bred, well-looking, gentle, good, and the best of Charlton blood. Dick, you are a trump! Let me congratulate you."

He stretches his hand across the table. His step-son places his in it, but under amused protest.

"My dear governor! really this is very embarrassing. What have I said to commit myself to this serious extent? I have a sort of married man feeling already, and upon my life I don't wish to Things can't rush on in this summary way—you mustn't, you know."

"Dick, listen to me—seriously, I beg. The one desire of my life is to see you settled."

"Then your desire is gratified, sir. Nothing could be more flatly settled than I feel at this moment."

"To see you settled," goes on Mr. Charlton, with some emotion, "with an estimable wife. Nothing else will do it, Dick."

"Are you sure that will, governor?" doubtfully. "Of nuptial bliss I know nothing, but I *have* known married men, and—well, to escape too much conjugal felicity, I have known them to rush 'anywhere, anywhere, out of the world.' My friend Englehart has a wife—I say no more."

"Your friend Englehart has a pernicious influence," exclaims Mr. Charlton, hotly; "but for him you would never have thought of this wild-goose chase to Central America. It was he that induced you to go with the Arctic Exploration party. Is the recollection of blubber and seal oil so savory that you long to be at it again?"

"No," Dick answers, "as a steady diet, I don't pine for blubber or seal oil; but in the Honduras affair——"

"Which you will never join, with my consent!" cries Mr. Charlton, growing red.

"Now, my *dear* sir," expostulates Dick, "consider. I stand pledged to Dr. Englehart and the rest of the Scientific Corps. It is true they might replace me, but I know they would rather I went; and even if I could bear to disappoint them, like Tony Lumpkin, I could not bear to disappoint myself. It is uncommonly kind of you, I know; I appreciate fully the affection that makes you desire to retain me; but you see, governor, I am an adventurer, a rolling stone, or nothing. If I stayed here I would turn into a veritable molly-coddle, I would spoil in too much sunshine and sweetness. I am a restless animal by nature. I must have a safety-valve of some kind, and what could be safer than Honduras and silver-mining? When I wished to join the Carlists——"

"You gave up that mad idea to please me. Give up this other, my boy, marry Nelly, and stay at home."

"Isn't that taking a great deal for granted, sir? It is one thing for Miss Charlton to accept your invitation and spend a few weeks here, quite another for her to accept *me*."

Mr. Charlton smiles significantly.

"Is that all? Try and see. You are a tall and proper fellow, Dick, an eligible *parti*, as the ladies put it; I wouldn't be too modest, if I were you. Come! I'm fond of you, my lad, you know that; to keep you with me is the one desire of my life. You are my heir—all I have is yours; make the old man happy, and remain with him. When I fell into this property, it was not for my own sake, my dear boy, I rejoiced, but for yours. Of course, in my will, I shall not forget these good little girls, who have come here at my bidding—some of my blood is in their veins; but you are the heir, you are my son. You are listening, Dick? And great wealth brings great responsibilities. I am growing too old for responsibility—stay and lift the load from my shoulders. Write to this fellow Englehart, curb your roving propensities, cease to be a rolling stone, marry Miss Charlton, or whomever you please—only stay with your old father, Dick."

"My dear sir," Dick says, and can say no more. He is more moved than he cares to show, but touched as he is, the thought of giving up the Central America project gives him a keen pang. He rises and goes over to the window, impatient with himself. "I must be an unfeeling dog," he thinks. "Any one else would yield at half this pleading. And yet what an utterly good-for-nothing life I shall lead here."

"Well, Dick!" Mr. Charlton says, following him with an anxious countenance.

"I'll try, sir," Dick Ffrench says, turning round; "don't press me too hard. I'll do what I can. Nature has made me a vagabond, and you can't transmute one of that frater-

nity into a respectable family man at once. But for your sake——"

Mr. Charlton grasps his hand, tears in his old eyes.

"God bless you, Dick—God bless you. I knew you would, you have too much of your mother in you to grieve wilfully any one who loves you. And Eleanor——"

"Ah! never mind that, governor. One thing at a time. And now I will leave you to join the ladies alone—I want a smoke and half an hour to think all this revolution over."

He opens the window, and steps out. The lovely summer gloaming yet lingers, although the moon is rising. Sweet scents greet him, utter stillness is around him. He turns into the entrance avenue, dark already under its arching trees, with a sense of loss and depression upon him, keen and strong. To give up a life of bright adventure, of ceaseless change, of scientific research, the society of men brilliant of intellect, good comrades, and indefatigable explorers, for an existence humdrum and monotonous to a degree, without excitement or object from year's end to year's end—it is no light thing Mr. Charlton has demanded of Richard Ffrench. As to Miss Charlton—but he is out on the high road now, and gives up the conundrum for the present.

"It is Kismet, I suppose," he thinks, gloomily, "and nothing remains but to cover my face, and die with dignity. I shall be a round peg in a square hole, all the rest of my life. Well, I will have the majority for company at least—I wonder if that is the man who called upon me the other day at Shaddeck Light? I ought to know that negligently graceful walk."

The man disappears as he looks, and Captain Ffrench saunters on. It is past eight; in the warm stillness of the summer evening, the ripple of the sea on the shore a quarter of a mile off, can be heard. Under the peach-trees by the southern wall the man takes his stand, and looks at his watch.

"A quarter after eight, by Jove!" he says; "but it is the deuce and all of a walk! If any one had told me a year ago that I would walk three miles on a hot July evening to see any young woman in the universe, and that young woman objecting in the strongest way—ah! well," with a sigh, "Call no man wise until he is dead."

* * * * * * * * *

In the drawing-room the gas is lit, and Vera at the piano is singing. At a table near sits Mrs. Charlton and her host, absorbed in chess.

Eleanor, near an open window, holds a book, but does not read. She is restless and nervous, starting at every sound, preoccupied and distrait. Dora sees it all. Dora, half buried in a big chair, with a strip of embroidery in her hand.

A clock strikes eight. Miss Charlton rises, lays aside her book, and passes through the open window. No one notices except Dora, and Dora glides to the window and watches her out of sight. Where is she going? Was the letter an assignation? Miss Lightwood feels she must know or perish. She follows Miss Charlton deliberately, unseen, unheard, and presently espies her at the other end of the grounds, where the ornamental garden ends and the orchard begins. A low stone wall and high hedge separate the Charlton grounds from the common land, and on the other side of the wall, leaning lightly upon it, Dora sees what she knows she will see, what she hopes she will see—a man.

"Aha!" cries Miss Lightwood, in triumph, "the pale, the pensive, the perfect Eleanor, makes and keeps assignations. The great Dick may be stupid and pig-headed, but I wonder what he will say to this?"

CHAPTER VIII.

BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON.

THE moon of the summer night has risen red and round, while yet in the west the opal brilliance of closing day lingers. But even with this warm after-glow on her face, Dora sees that Eleanor is fixedly pale as she goes to the place of tryst. The man's face she cannot see—a broad straw hat shades it, and he stands well within the shadow of the trees. She herself is hidden among some clustering evergreens—for fruit trees and forest trees seem to grow indiscriminately in the Charlton orchard. She stands here a moment irresolute—curiosity and malice combined, are tempting her terribly. Honorable in any way, Dora is not; unprincipled in all small matters, she is, to an extraordinary degree. As a general thing, eavesdropping is not worth the trouble—to-night it is. If Eleanor really has a lover, and is out of the race, what remains for her but a quiet "walk over." Still this may be some near and obnoxious relative; she has read of such things, and somehow Eleanor Charlton does not seem the sort of girl to have clandestine lovers. In Dora's eyes she is at once an artful coquette, and a prude of the first order. If she could but hear! how earnestly they seem to converse—it is too provoking to stand here and lose all that. She will run the risk—her dress is dark, and soundless—she *must* hear.

And now you know what manner of woman Theodora Lightwood is. She tiptoes close, her heart beating with expectation, draws her drapery closely about her, leans her head well forward, and deliberately listens.

For a moment she can hear nothing but a low murmur—it is Eleanor who is speaking, and at all times Miss Charlton

nas a low voice. It is even more subdued than usual now, but in its accents Dora knows there is distress.

"That is all quite true," the man says coolly; "what is the use of reminding me of it? You may be a frost-maiden, Nelly, a marble Diana, with every wayward impulse well in hand, but you see I am only mortal—very mortal, my dear, and I could not keep away. Come, forgive me. If I loved you less I might find obedience more easy."

Eleanor speaks, and again Dora, straining every nerve, loses her reply. But the man breaks in impatiently.

"Dishonorable! clandestine! as if I came sneaking here from choice—as if I would not go up to the front door, and ring the bell, and demand to see my betrothed wife, before the whole Charlton conclave, if you would but let me. But there is your mother, and I am detrimental, and Ffrench is the heir, and son of the house. You might as well yield first as last, Nelly, my dear. I am a poor devil, good for nothing, with no prospects for years to come, and this fellow, Ffrench, is heir, they say, to two or three millions. It is only a question of time; you cannot hold out. We both know perfectly well why your mother has brought you here. It would be madness not to take the goods the gods provide, and——Where are you going?"

"Back to the house," Eleanor answers, indignantly. "I should never have come. Every word you utter is an insult. If you can think this of me, it is indeed time we should part."

"Oh! forgive me," he cries out, a real passion in his tone, "I am a brute. No, I do not doubt you; you are true as steel, true as truth; but when I think of the difference——Nelly, you must despise me—how can you help it, such a useless drone as I am, lounging through life without aim, or energy, or ambition? I despise myself when I wake up enough to feel at all. If I had a spark of generosity, I would force you to accept your free lom—and this Ffrench

is a fine fellow too—but I am not generous; I love you as strongly as a stronger man might do, and I cannot. But I will give up this idle life, I swear it, Nelly. I will try and make myself worthy of you. Only give me time, dear, try and trust me, and—and don't listen to Richard Ffrench. He will ask you to marry him—how can he help it? He is fond of you already; he has your picture over there in that hut among the rocks Keep him off, Nelly, don't let your mother influence you, don't marry him for his money. Wait, wait, wait, and the day will come——"

A branch on which Dora breathlessly leans, breaks. At the sharp crash Eleanor starts up hastily, and the culprit, stilling her very heart-beats, crouches low. The darkness of the evergreens protects her, the moonlight flooding the open with pale glory, does not pierce here. But she loses what follows. When she is sufficiently reassured to listen, it is Eleanor who is speaking.

"No," she says, resolutely, "no, again and again. You must not write, you must not call, you must not come here. You must leave St. Ann's to-morrow. Oh! if you cared for me would you compromise me in this way? If you knew the shock, the pain, your letter gave me, the shame I feel at meeting you like this. But it must not be, it never shall be again. You will go and we will wait. You ask me to trust you; I have—I do—I always will. If you failed me, Ernest, how could I live? You know what my life is, dreary enough, Heaven knows, but I think of you and the years to come, and I wait and hope. But I will meet you no more, and you must go. You need fear no rival in Captain Ffrench; if he cared for me I should know it. His heart is in his profession, his exploring mania is the grand passion of his life. I like him—he is a brave and gallant gentleman, but I belong to you I can never belong to any one else."

"My brave, loyal Nelly!"

Dora, peeping through her leafy screen, sees him take both her hands. They are evidently about to part, and she has not seen him once. The thick drooping boughs that screen her do the same good office for him. Another moment and they have parted. Eleanor moves quickly towards the house, Dora shrinks noiselessly back in her green covert. The man lingers until she is out of sight, then turns and walks slowly away.

For a few minutes Miss Lightwood remains in her retreat, triumph swelling her heart. She has no rival to fear then—she has only to play her cards cleverly, and the game is her own. How fair Charlton looks by moonlight, the tall urns gleaming like silver, the high black trees looking a primeval forest in the uncertain light. Such a lovely home for her and Vera, such freedom from toil, such exemption from care, such a luxurious life. I think if Dora could have prayed, she would have knelt down there, and prayed for success. But prayer is not much in her way—of the earth, earthy she is to the core. Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow you die, and death is at the end of all things, in Dora's creed. Marry rich, and spend his money—these are the two great duties of every woman's life.

Captain Ffrench has not returned when Miss Charlton re-enters the drawing room. Vera is still amusing herself at the piano—she has a sweet voice, and plays cleverly. The chess-players are engrossed with queens and castles. Dora's absence she does not notice.

"'I don't pretend to teach the age,'"

sings Vera in a spirited voice ——

"'It's mission, or its folly,
A task like that requires a sage—
My disposition's jolly.'"

"Oh, Nelly!" she cries, turning round, "Is that you? Have you seen Dot? I thought you had both gone out to be sentimental together in the moonlight."

"Is Dot not here?" Eleanor asks. "No, I have not seen her—we have not been together."

"Then perhaps she is with Captain Dick; he has disappeared as well. It *is* a heavenly night, and I would have gone out too, but I didn't want to play gooseberry. Are you going again?"

"I am going upstairs. Good-night, dear."

"Good-night, Nelly," the girl responds.

While Eleanor goes up the broad carpeted stairway, she can hear the fresh happy young voice:

"'And what is, after all, success?
My life is fair and sunny.
Let other's covet Fame's caress;
I'm satisfied with money.'"

The old story, Eleanor thinks, even from this little girl's innocent lips. Is wealth, then, life's highest aim? At all events, the lack of it mars many a life. She goes to her room, but she does not light the lamp, or go to bed. It is only ten, as she can see by her poor little silver watch, and her recent interview has banished all desire for sleep. She wishes she had never come here, but her mother so insisted—it looks so horribly like a deliberate attempt to ensnare Richard Ffrench. Does *he* think she has come for that? Her cheeks burn at the thought. Were it not for this drawback, a few weeks in this pleasant country house, with its gracious host, its rest from the weary tread-mill of her teacher's life, would be unspeakably invigorating. But if Captain Ffrench thinks that ——

Her door opens, her mother enters.

"In the dark, Eleanor?" Even in her blandest moments, Mrs. Charlton's voice has a rasping quality. "What a lovely

night. Where were you and Captain Ffrench wandering all evening?"

"I was not with Captain Ffrench," Eleanor answers, her heart fluttering guiltily. "I have not seen him since dinner.'

"No?" sharply, "where then did you go—alone?"

"It is such a lovely night, mother. Will you not sit down?"

"Was Dora Lightwood with you?"

"No."

"*Not* with you. Was she with Richard Ffrench?"

"I do not know. Very probably."

There is silence—uncomfortable, ominous silence. Eleanor feels through every tingling nerve, that a storm is brewing, and braces herself to meet it.

"Eleanor," her mother begins, in a deep, repressed voice, "what does this mean? Are you deliberately resolved to thwart me? Are you mad enough to fling away the one great chance of your life? Are you going to give Richard Ffrench to Dora Lightwood? Wait!" as Eleanor is about to speak, "I do not want any evasions, any shuffling, any beating about the bush. It is in your power before you quit Charlton, to quit as the affianced wife of its heir, if you will. From Mr. Charlton's own lips, to-night, have I learned this."

Her daughter looks at her. The issue has come, the truth must be told. Mrs. Charlton has a fine furious temper, a bitter bad tongue; who should know that better than her luckless daughter? And Eleanor shrinks quivering from the ordeal, but she never falters in her resolve.

"From Mr. Charlton's own lips," repeats Mrs. Charlton, emphatically. "It seems he spoke to Dick at dinner, and Dick gave him to understand that—that 'Barkis was willin','" with a grim attempt at facetiousness. "He admires you, it seems, more than he ever admired any one before; at the slightest encouragement he is ready to speak. He

is an excellent young man, a little wild, as I said about a roving life, but without a single vice. He has good manners, good looks, a fine education, and acknowledged talents. Now what can you—what can any one want more?"

Silence.

"You will be one of the richest women going; all your drudgery will be at an end. You will have a home where I can close my days in the peace and comfort I always was used to in other times. Alfred can go to Germany to study music" (Alfred is a juvenile son and brother, down in New Orleans), "and Mr. Charlton says you will make the happiness of his life. Nothing could be more affectionate than his manner of speaking of you. My dear, it was a red-letter day in your life, in all our lives, the day we came here."

Silence.

"Eleanor," the rasping voice takes a rising inflection, "do you hear?"

"Yes, mother, I hear."

"And have you nothing to say? In *my* youth girls answered their mothers."

"What do you wish me to say?"

Mrs. Charlton is growing exasperated—always an easy thing for Mrs. Charlton. Eleanor's voice is full of repressed feeling, but it sounds cold in her mother's ears, her hands are tightly locked in her lap, but her mother does not see. She fixes her hard stare on Eleanor's shrinking face.

"Will you—or will you not," she slowly says, "marry Richard Ffrench?"

"I will not!"

"You will not?"

"I will not. Mother, I cannot. Do not be angry, do not scold—oh! do not! It is impossible."

"Why—if I may ask?"

The storm is very near, distant thunder is in every tone, sheet lightning in every glance.

"I do not care for him. I never can care for him, and I must love the man I marry."

Mrs. Charlton laughs—a horrid, rasping, little laugh, full of rage.

"Love! Care for him! Oh! you fool! To think that any girl of three-and-twenty, obliged to work like a galley-slave, should talk such rot. You mean then to tell me, deliberately and in cold blood to tell me, that when this young man asks you, you will say no?"

"I will say no."

She is trembling from head to foot with repressed excitement, but she will not flinch. There is blank silence for a moment—then the storm bursts. And such a storm! Mrs. Charlton is a virago, a vulgar virago; she has never curbed anger or rage in her life; she has a tongue like a two-edged sword. Eleanor has seen her in her rages often, but never quite at white heat until to-night. She bows before the tempest, she quails, she hides her face in her hands, fear, shame, disgust, shaking her as a reed.

"Oh! mother! mother!" she gasps once, "for the love of Heaven!" but her mother pays no heed. The tornado must spend itself, and does.

As eleven strikes, she strides out of the room, banging the door with a last wooden "damn," and the contest is ended for to-night. For to-night. Alas! Eleanor knows too well, that to-morrow, and all the to-morrows, and until the end of her life, she will never hear the last of this. She lays her folded arms on the window, and her head upon them, as though she never cared to lift it again. As she lies, white and spent, she hears Vera singing, going along the passage outside:

> "'Alas! how easily things go wrong;
> A sigh too much, or a kiss too long.'

"I wonder if Nelly is asleep——" the voice breaks off in

soliloquy. "Here is a kiss through the keyhole, asleep or awake.

"'And there follows a mist and a sweeping rain,
And life is never the same again.'"

The voice, fresh and clear as a skylark's, ceases, a door shuts, Vera is in her room. Then stillness. Then down on the lawn below, voices—the shrill treble of Dora, and the deeper tones of Captain Ffrench.

Coming home at his leisure, a little after eleven, Captain Ffrench finds Miss Lightwood lingering out of doors, enjoying the midnight moonlight and coolness. A shadow still rests on the captain's brow; he has accepted his fate—none the less he finds it hard.

"What!" Dora cries, lifting her pale eyebrows, "alone! Where is Nelly?"

"Miss Charlton? I have not seen her."

"Not seen her?" Dora knits her brows. "Oh! but that is nonsense, Captain Ffrench. I saw her with you not an hour ago."

"I assure you, no. I have not seen Miss Charlton since dinner."

"No?" Dora repeats, and now the blue artless eyes open wide. "Who then could it have been? I made sure it was you."

"I do not understand."

"She has no gentlemen acquaintances in St. Ann's—she told me so; and yet that letter this morning—— Captain Ffrench, I believe you are jesting with me—it *must* have been you."

"Miss Lightwood, I am still 'far wide.' Awfully stupid of me, but upon my word, I don't understand a syllable you are saying. Something about Miss Charlton, is it not? She has not been with me; I have not seen her since we parted after dinner. Where is she? Nothing has gone wrong, I trust?"

"Where is she?" repeats Dora, in a puzzled tone; "in her room, perhaps. I do not know; she has not been with us all the evening. Captain Ffrench, it is the oddest thing—— You know that cluster of peach-trees over there by the orchard wall?"

He nods.

"Well, an hour ago, I was roving through the grounds, tempted out by the beauty of the night. I chanced to pass near the peach-trees, and I saw Eleanor standing there, talking across the wall to a man. I was sure it was you, and——"

But Captain Ffrench understands her now, and starts up.

"Not another word!" he says. "I beg your pardon—but I did not comprehend. Will you not take cold out here in the dew? it is falling heavily. Have all the good people gone to bed?"

"I suppose so." Dora bites her lip angrily. Fool he is not, but he has made her feel like one, and she is beginning to hate him.

"Then, I think I shall follow their example;" he struggles for a moment with a yawn. "At what hour to-morrow shall I expect you, Miss Lightwood? I and the Nixie will be at your service from five o'clock."

For a second she is tempted to decline, but discretion is the better part of valor. Dora has this advantage over Mrs. Charlton, she has her pride and her temper well in hand.

"Oh, that is an unearthly hour," she says with her shrill laugh. "Say half-past six; I never can be ready sooner."

"Half-past six then. Good-night, Miss Lightwood," and without ceremony he goes.

Dora's work is done; the beauty of the night has ceased to tempt her. But she stands a moment, and it is no loving glance she casts after the tall captain. She follows slowly, ascends to her room, the sleepy housekeeper fastens doors and windows, and silence reigns within and without.

Vera lifts a dark head from her pillow, and opens two sleepy dark eyes.

"Is it you, Dot? at last. What a time you have been. You were with Captain Dick, weren't you? Isn't he splendid? Oh! how sleepy I am!" a great yawn. "And this is the end of our first day, such a long, delightful day! Dot, I never want to leave Charlton as long as I live."

She is asleep as she says it. Her sister stoops and kisses her.

"And you *shall* not, little Vera!" is her answer.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE GAME WAS MADE.

A FORTNIGHT has passed, fourteen long, sunny, summer days. One after another they dawn and darken; morning after morning the sun rises in fiery splendor, baking the earth, and sky, and grass, and human beings, until the eye grows weary of the perpetual dazzle, and longs for gray shadows, and drifting clouds, and the refreshing patter of rain. No rain has fallen all the fourteen days, no clouds, except long white mare's tails, and billows of translucent white, have floated over the brilliant blue of the sky. But August is here, the sultriness is indescribable, and as before dawn it is darkest, so at its hottest, it must cool off. Changes in sky, and sea, and land, proclaim that a mid-summer tempest is at hand, and that kindly showers will soon refresh the quivering earth.

At Charlton Place, life goes on with little outward change or incident, but each in her way, and very quietly, all these good people, according to their light, are making their little game.

The heat prevents much going abroad, but in the early morning, and dewy evenings, Captain Dick devotes himself to his step-father's fair guests, like the gallant gentleman he is. There are long rows and sails, in the pink dawn, and the white night, long drives or rambles in the starry twilight, a picnic once out in the woods behind St. Ann's, visits to Shaddeck Light, where lengthy-limbed Daddy reigns alone. For Captain Ffrench has pretty well thrown aside scientific books, and charts, and drawings—if he is to give up Honduras, what are all these things but bitterness of spirit? There has been a dinner party at which the nobility and gentry of St. Ann's have mustered strong—the Howells, the Deerings, the Sleights—all the landed proprietors have been bidden, and have come. There have been a few innoxious high teas, perpetual croquet, a good deal of piano-playing, and unlimited flirtation. For during August, young men come to St. Ann's and fish up in the hill-side tarns, drive fast horses, play polo and billiards, and recuperate generally, amid the daisies and dandelions, causing innumerable flutters among the unappropriated hearts spoken of in Captain Ffrench's letter, and adding insult to injury, when they say smiling good-byes under the August moon, and depart unscathed.

They love and they ride away, these brilliant golden youths, sons and nephews of the first families mentioned above, and reck little of the cracked vestal hearts, and sighing autumn winds they leave behind.

Matters progress smoothly at Charlton. The master of the manor beams through his double eyeglass, and sees all things working together to accomplish the desire of his heart. Dick goes no more to Shaddeck Light. He makes a social martyr of himself and drinks iced tea and lemonade, loafs with his hands in his pockets, amid the croquet players, with no outward sign of the inward disgust that consumes him; takes Eleanor out for lengthy rambles in the gray of the July

evenings, is charioteer of the dainty *phaeton*, and bowls her over the long, dusty country roads, prevails upon her to get up mornings and go out with him upon the high seas in the Nixie. Sometimes Vera is of the party, oftener they are alone. Once or twice, Mr. Charlton has come upon him stretched at beauty's feet, in the long golden afternoons, reading aloud Tennyson, or Mrs. Browning, and a muscular young man must be pretty far gone when he comes to *that*. Eleanor's sweet serious face is a book the astute old gentleman cannot read—if she suffers, she suffers in silence, and trains her countenance well. Of the storms, the scoldings, the reproaches, the coaxings, the tempests of tears, that obtain almost nightly, no one dreams. Perhaps Dora guesses—those pale, cold blue eyes of hers glitter with maliciously knowing light, sometimes, but certainly no one else does. She is forced upon Richard Ffrench, neither he nor she can avert it—"who is stronger than his fate?"—and she accepts her part almost apathetically. She cannot get away, and until he speaks she can say nothing. He is not very badly hurt, and she likes him for his honest, simple desire to please his father. She looks at him with kindly, half amused, half vexed eyes, as he follows her about, moodily sometimes, and with his heart *en route* to Central America, but always brightening at her smile.

Captain Dick has quite made up his mind to obey, has written to Dr. Englehart to tell him so. Ah! what a pang that letter cost him. No woman could ever lacerate the captain's heart as that letter did. Since he is to obey, he will obey with a good grace—cheerily given, is twice given; and with Eleanor for his wife, and croquet, and afternoon tea at an end forever, surely he will be an ungracious dog if he is not happy. At present, the slops, and the balls, and mallets are part of his duty as a wooer, and Dick Ffrench believes in facing his duty without flinching. Every day his admiration for Eleanor becomes more profound; it is a lib-

eral education to converse with her. And then she is so good, so pure, so earnest, so true.

"A man should go up a ladder to look for a friend, and down a ladder to look for a wife," says the cynical old axiom, but Richard Ffrench has not a grain of cynicism in him, and does not believe it. Mentally, he holds a man's wife should be his equal, morally, his superior. Veneration is an essential element in his love; Miss Charlton commands homage and esteem, wherever she goes. If a man cannot be happy as her husband—— Lying on his back, on the grass, his hands clasped under his head, his eyes on the sailing clouds, Dick breaks off here. What right has he to think she will ever accept him? Is it likely that so charming a girl has reached three-and-twenty with her heart untouched? He does not like the idea of leasing for life a heart that has held former lodgers, and been swept and garnished after, for him. Dora's sting has not rankled; he is the most unsuspicious of human beings; her little poisoned shaft has fallen harmless. And Mrs. Charlton has told the governor, who has told him, that it will be all right.

Confound the old lady, Dick thinks—it is brushing the bloom off his peach, it is desecrating what should be sacred to Eleanor and himself, this vulgar match-making. Is not the uncertainty, the doubt, the hope, the despair, half the delight of wooing?

No word, no look of hers, have ever held out the faintest hope; the smile that welcomes his coming, speeds his parting; she is as serenely unconscious of his transparent meaning, as that star up yonder, tremulous in the blue. Well—it is best so—who cares for the plum ready to drop into his mouth the moment it is opened?

No more than the others, can he see the pain, the shame, the martyrdom, the girl endures for his sake. In her room at night, the old battle rages, mutely on her part, furiously on her mother's. It is the great stake of Mrs. Charlton's

life, all her hopes are in it. As the mother of the rich Mrs. Ffrench her future is secured. Shall she for a whim, a nonsensical, sentimental whim of Eleanor's, yield her point? We none of us like to be beaten—Mrs. Charlton likes it less than the majority; in point of fact, she seldom knows when she *is* beaten, and often wins in the end through sheer obstinacy and pig-headedness. So the nightly war goes on. The field is free to Eleanor, now, even Dora has accepted defeat gracefully, and retired. To-morrow or the next day, Richard Ffrench will speak; it is only for Eleanor to say a simple "yes," and open paradise to her whole family.

Dora has retired from the contest. With perfect good humor Miss Lightwood has resigned the prize; is "scratched," in sporting parlance, for the race; has thrown up the sponge to Fate; has lain down her cards before the game has fairly begun. A smiling change has come over her; she is the sunshine of the house; she is gracious even to Mrs. Charlton. No one of them all is as much at home in Charlton as she. She inspects the dining-room and table, before each meal, adorns it with flowers, and flits about like a sunbeam. In the evenings, when Eleanor wanders through the grounds with Dick, or Vera plays in unison with the violin, Dora takes a hand at whist, with a dummy, and the dowager, and the master of the house. She does not know much about the obsolete game, but she is bright and quick, and learns rapidly. Sometimes her eyes wander away from her trumps, to the pair at the piano, or to the cool, wide window, and a singular smile gleams in her eyes. Perhaps that conversation over the orchard wall has something to do with it; both these people are transparent to her.

When the lover speaks, the maiden will say no. And in his pain, his chagrin, to whom so likely, as to her soothing little self, is this big blundering captain likely to turn? Hearts and rubber balls are best caught on the rebound. Dora is making haste slowly, and meantime is winning

golden opinions from all sorts or people—from the kitchen-maids below stairs, to the Seigneur of Charlton, who calls her the sunbeam of the house.

For Vera, the last of this family group, she is fairly puzzled. To give up anything on which she has once set her heart, is not like Dora, and yet Dora seems to be doing it here. She has resigned almost without a struggle. Presently Charlton will be but a beautiful dream of the past, and life will recommence amid the crash, and turmoil, and din, and dust of New York. Oh! dear! And Dot must go back to the show-rooms on Fourteenth Street; poor Dot! who is never strong, who has a hacking cough in the winter, who has something the matter with her heart, and who was told long ago that a life free from care and anxiety was absolutely necessary to her. It is for Dot, Vera mourns. But, after all, if Captain Dick cares for Nelly, Nelly he must have. In all the world there is neither king nor kaiser to be named in the same breath with this splendid Captain Dick, who has been everywhere, and seen and done everything; who has fought like a hero, who is gentle as a woman, who is strong, and brave, and good, and kind, and learned, and clever, and—in one word—perfection.

It is simply one of the fixed laws of nature, that Captain Dick shall have everything he wants, and if he wants Eleanor, Eleanor he must have, and the loss is poor Dot's—that is all. Nelly is the dearest, the sweetest of created beings, she is *almost* good enough even for the peerless Richard, and Vera hopes in her warm little heart, they will be—oh, so happy. Sometimes, perhaps, in the summers to come, they may invite her and Dora down, and it is good and magnanimous of Dora to give up so easily, and devote herself to the house, and the card-playing, and refuse to go with them, even when she—Vera—makes a third, and laugh and stay at home, and write letters for Mr. Charlton, and superintend things generally, as if she were Dick's sister, and the little

daughter of the house. Vera is all in a glow of admiration for her sister, for Eleanor, for Dick. There *never* were such lovely people, she thinks, with enthusiasm, nor such a paradise of a place before.

* * * * * * *

But a change is at hand. For the last two days, the sun has gone down lurid and angry; copper-colored clouds chase each other over the sky, the surf booms sullenly down on the sand, a coming storm is near. The moral atmosphere is charged with electricity as well, a crisis is at hand. Eleanor looks pale and frightened, Richard loses his appetite to an extent that alarms Vera. He smokes a great deal more than is good for him; he has been out for two successive nights on the Bay. Vera wonders if everybody has it as badly as this, and if so, how is it that married men and women look so dreadfully commonplace and prosy, all the rest of their lives. She wishes—for Dick's sake—it were well over, she wishes, for Dick's sake, that Eleanor would put him out of his misery, and let him have a Christian relish for his victuals, and a sensible night's sleep once more.

One afternoon—it is drawing close upon dinner-time—she curls herself up among a pile of cushions in the dusky drawing-room, and drops asleep. It has been oppressively sultry all day; the weather is asphyxiating; to double up somewhere and go to sleep, is a necessity of life. Vera sleeps and dreams. She dreams of the person who was last in her waking thoughts, Captain Dick. She is urging upon him a large slice of bread and butter, and he is gloomily declining. Can bread and butter, he darkly demands, minister to a mind diseased? It is certainly Captain Dick's voice that is speaking, and the tone is more tense and troubled than that in which one generally declines the staff of life. It is a suppressed tone, too.

"It is really no, then?" he is saying, "there is no hope?"

"It is no," another voice, a distressed voice, this time,

answers. "Oh! Captain Ffrench, do you not think I would have prevented this if I could? But what could I do? You do not know—you do not know——"

"I know that for all the world I would not distress you," the deeper tone breaks in; "that you gave me no reason to hope. I know that I hold you higher than all women, and that if you *could* care for me, it would make the happiness of my life. I am not worthy of you—few men could be; but as Heaven hears me, I would try. Eleanor! think again—must it be no?"

"It must be no."

And then Vera starts up in wild affright, and stares about her. They do not see her, but there they are, standing together by the window. Their backs are turned—the door is near—she must escape. Oh! how awful if they should catch her here—a spy! In a mortal panic she rises, sidles out of the room, and sits flat down on the hall floor—crushed!

Crushed! It is all over, the great agony is at an end, he has put his fate to the touch and lost it all. Eleanor has refused him, refused Richard Ffrench, refused the heir of Charlton, refused the best, the bravest, the most beautiful of his sex, refused a hero, a demi-god, *refused Captain Dick!* Vera sits stunned. There are antitheses the human mind declines to take in—this is one. To refuse Captain Ffrench, for any woman to say no to such a man! By and by Vera may get over this; at present the blow has felled her. She sits perfectly motionless. Captain Dick has asked Eleanor to marry him, and Eleanor has said no.

And then in Vera's breast a great indignation rises and burns. How dare she! To think of her presuming to make him unhappy; of her presuming to refuse him anything! If *she* feels so crushed, so outraged, how must he feel? It is as if the regicidal hand of the base-born Beggar Maid had lifted and stabbed King Cophetua to the heart, in the hour of his kingly condescension! She will never like Eleanor

any more, never. Nothing that can happen to her will ever be too bad. She deserves to have to teach music to the last day of her life, she deserves to have such a mother, she deserves to be an old maid. Oh! why has it not been Dot? Dot would never have said no. Dot would not have made him miserable. What will Mr. Charlton say? and will Dick rush away in a frenzy to the other end of the world, to the torrid or the arctic zones, and become a gloomy misanthrope forever after?

A sound—a door opens—it is Eleanor coming out. She nearly stumbles over Vera. Her face is pale, her eyes red, she has been crying. Good enough for her, Vera thinks, viciously; she hopes she will cry her eyes and nose as red as they deserve to be. She flashes a glance of anger and scorn upon her, but Miss Charlton does not seem to see it. She hurries away, and upstairs. And then through the open door-way Vera sees Captain Dick, his hat pulled well over his eyes, striding down the garden, and out of sight. Vera's first impulse is to go after him to comfort him, and Vera's rule of life is to act on impulse. She is on her feet in a moment, but before she can dart off, Dora comes rustling down-stairs, in a dinner dress, as blue as her eyes, and lays hold of her.

"Where are you going?" she asks.

"After him," answers Vera, "don't stop me, Dot. If you knew how unhappy he is——"

"Ah!" says Dora, and laughs, "you have overheard then—it has come? She said no, of course?"

"She said no, and I hate her!" cries Vera.

"I thought it was coming—I have seen the signs and the tokens before," laughs Dora, still retaining her hold. "No, my dear, you must not go after Captain Dick; it would not be proper; he would not thank you, and he is past all comforting of yours. But he will get over it, it is a way men have. How does my hair look done in this style, and do

not these pink roses go exquisitely with this shade of blue? I am afraid my charming toilet will be thrown away on poor Captain Dick." Dot's elfish laugh sounds more shrill than usual. "He snubbed me unmercifully one night, not long ago—it is my turn now."

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF THE FAIRY TALE.

GLOOM has fallen upon the Charlton household. It is so dark at half-past six, the dinner hour, that they are forced to light the gas. Miss Charlton has a headache, and does not appear. Captain Ffrench comes in late, and manfully does his best to seem as usual, but the effort is not the success it deserves to be. Vera's eyes, in their wistful brown beauty, rest on him, full of mingled admiration and compassion. She thinks of the Spartan boy and his cloak, and the wolf gnawing at his vitals—or was it a fox? The race of Spartans is not extinct, for here is Captain Dick essaying cheerful commonplaces, and sipping *veuve cliquot*, as though he liked both, bearing himself as bravely as though his heart had not just been broken. Dora shines with abnormal brilliancy, her blue eyes flash, her delicate cheeks flush, her shrill laugh rings out; she rallies Captain Dick until he burns to shy his dinner-plate at her. She is a social meteor, quite dazzling in fact, and Mr. Charlton, looking and listening admiringly, wonders what the house will be like when she is gone.

After dinner Vera goes to the piano. She is fond of music, and the evening is the only time cool enough for so much exertion. Mechanically, Dick follows her, and leans with folded arms upon the instrument, staring in a blank sort of

way at a picture on the wall above it. It is Cenci; and the dusk prophetic face, with its haunting, wistful eyes, reminds him somehow of Vera herself. He is glad to get away from Dora; her covert innuendoes have been stabbing him like knives.

"What a little devil's doll she is!" he thinks, with very unusual savagery. "How does she come to know anything about it so soon?"

Vera's music soothes him. A dreary sense of loss and pain oppresses him. If he were only free to go with the expedition—if the governor had not wrung that half promise from him. For the present he must go away somewhere, it would be horribly uncomfortable for Eleanor to have him in the house. How nobly she spoke, how lovely she looked, with great tears in her eyes, and divine pity in her face. Ah! he never deserved such a prize, great rough fellow that he is, and yet if she could have cared for him——

> "The moon's on the lake, and the mist's on the brae,
> And the clan has a name that is nameless by day,"

Vera's sweet, strong voice rings out spiritedly the stirring Scotch ballad.

It is oppressively close. Sheet lightning is blazing in continual zig-zags all along the horizon—paling the yellow gleam of the lamps. Now and then, a great drop plashes audibly outside; from the sea comes at intervals, a low, weird moaning, as of a sentient thing in pain. The trees writhe and toss wildly in the darkness—all nature feels the coming convulsion, and shrinks.

"The storm is very near," says Mr. Charlton, lifting his white head. "We will have it to-night."

They do not talk much, this evening, the oppression of the atmospheric change is upon them all. But Dora keeps brilliant and sparkling to the last; plays a game of chess with her host, and going to the piano afterwards, sings, at his

request, the old time love ditty of Barbara Allan. Captain Ffrench does not leave his post, and the malice in the sparkling eyes of the singer gleams laughingly out as she looks up at him.

"Then slowly, slowly, came she up,
And slowly came she nigh him,
And all she said, when there she came,
'Young man, I think you're dying!'"

"It is curious," she says, and laughs, "but Nelly always puts me in mind of cruel Barbara Allan. I can fancy her walking up to the deathbed of some love-lorn swain, and calmly saying, 'Young man, I think you're dying!' Werther's Charlotte must have been of that type, pale, passionless —don't you think so? You remember Thackeray's funny version of the tragedy—'Charlotte, when she saw his body borne past her on a shutter, like a well-conducted person, went on cutting bread and butter.' Nelly would go on cutting bread and butter too. What do you think about it, Captain Ffrench?"

She is laughing immoderately at the young man's disgusted face, and without waiting for reply, returns to the chess-table, and challenges Mr. Charlton to another game. With the streaming light of the chandelier full upon her, her gleaming prettiness looks uncanny. Mrs. Charlton watches her sourly for a while, then, complaining of the heat, gets up and goes.

"Tell poor dear Nelly how much we have missed her," calls Dora, with her mocking smile; "I do so hope her headache is better. To-morrow, you know, Captain Ffrench and Mr. Fred Howell are to take us over to the Pine Barren. It would be such a pity if she could not go."

A malevolent glance is the elder lady's answer. Not a spark of Dora's eldritch malice is lost upon her. All evening she has been uncomfortable. Eleanor's absence, and headache—she is not subject to headache; Dick Ffrench's moody silence—these are alarming tokens. Can it be—(in

the sultriness of the airless night her blood chills at the thought)—can it be that Eleanor has carried out her reckless threat, and refused him? Refused Charlton! refused the finest fortune in the State. Her hands clench, her hard eyes flash. If she has——

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The gloom deepens with the morning, both within and without. All night long the rain has poured in torrents, is pouring still, when Vera comes down-stairs. It hardly waits to pour, it drives in white blinding sheets of water, over land and sea, it drifts furiously against the glass, it beats down flowers and trees. A high wind is blowing outside. Where she stands Vera can hear the thunder of the surf on the shore; it is no child's play down among the white caps, this August morning. How those white sea-horses must toss their foamy manes, and churn, and break, and roar about Shaddeck Light. She hopes Daddy is not nervous, alone there on that lonely rock, in this shrill whistling storm. How good of Captain Dick to have rescued that poor half-witted lad, the butt of the town, half-starved, wholly beaten, and given him a home in the little island house.

She wonders how Captain Dick feels this morning, if he slept last night. People crossed in love do not, as a rule, sleep over well, Vera has understood. Who would have thought Eleanor could be so cold-hearted, so cruel, so blind to so much perfection. But, perhaps, she likes some one else; it seems impossible though that any woman could be faithful to any man, after seeing this king among men. Surely infidelity in such a case would be a positive virtue. There *must* be some reason. No sane human being could do so extraordinary a thing, without a powerful motive.

Perhaps Eleanor has a clandestine husband already, down there in Louisiana—she has read of such things in novels. Vera's ideas are thrown, so to speak, on their hind legs; she is trying with all her might to account for Eleanor's folly.

She finds, upon consideration, that she cannot hate her, that she is more disposed this morning to look upon her in sorrow than in anger; but the reason that is strong enough to make her say no to Captain Dick, is beyond all surmise of hers.

As she stands, Eleanor comes down. Her face is startlingly pale, her eyes have a wild, hunted, frightened look, all the sweet and gracious calm, that makes her greatest charm, is gone. She looks as though she had not slept, her lips tremble, as she says good-morning.

"You are sick!" Vera exclaims. "You look as if you had been sick a week. Were you awake all night? Was it the storm?"

She makes a gesture of assent, and coming close to the window, lays her forehead against the glass, with a sort of low moan. Vera's eyes fill with a great compassion. Can it be that she loves Captain Dick after all, that some reason obliges her to refuse him, and that she is suffering all this anguish on his account? She softens, the last remnant of her indignation fades away. Miss Charlton is not wholly hardened then, after all.

"Does your head ache still?" she softly asks, coming close. "Poor dear Nelly! I am so sorry."

Eleanor passes her arm around the girl's slender waist, but does not otherwise reply. In her eyes there is such hopeless trouble, such dark terror, that it frightens Vera.

How is the child to know of the horrible scene enacted in Eleanor's room last night—of the bitter storm of reproaches, of vulgar vituperation, of fierce threats, under which she shrank and cowered? She turns sick at heart now, as she recalls it. In all her mother's furious rages, she has never seen the fury of last night equalled. She has not slept at all; her head aches, her body aches, her heart aches, she seems one sickening ache from head to foot. And it is to go on forever, day after day, month after month, the same miserable, ceaseless scold, scold, scold, to the bitter end.

Mrs. Charlton does not appear at breakfast. The truth is, she has raged herself ill, and into a fit of blackest sulks. Eleanor is forbidden to enter her room, whether she lives or dies, to speak to her no more, until she comes to her senses. One of the maids fetches her up tea and buttered toast; her daughter knows her too well to dare to disobey.

Captain Ffrench is absent also. Late last night, it seems, after the family had retired, he went to St. Ann's, and now, of course, is storm-bound. Dora trips down, the sparkle of last night scarcely dimmed. Not all the sweeping tempest of wind and rain is able to blur one jot of her gay brightness. Mr. Charlton comes, but less debonair than usual. In point of fact his old enemy, rheumatic gout, has been shooting warning twinges for the past two or three days, and this morning he is barely able to hobble to breakfast. He knows what is in store for him, doubly trying now, with a houseful of fair guests, but it is one of the things no fine old gentleman of his years and habits can hope to escape, and he puts the best possible face on his affliction.

Dora is full of sweetest commiseration, Eleanor has a far-away frightened look still in her eyes, and eats nothing at all. Vera feels that in common sympathy she, too, should eat nothing, with the whole family so to say *in extremis*; but her appetite remains a painful and powerful fact, and will not be said nay. She is ashamed of herself, and consumes muffins and fresh eggs in a sneaky, apologetic fashion, and is relieved when the ordeal is over.

And now the long day begins. Rain, rain, rain—oh! how it pours—it looks as if it might come down for a week. Mr. Charlton is forced to return to his study, leaning on Dora's arm which she insists on his taking. They look so absurd—the tall, elderly invalid, and the mite of a woman, hobbling away together, that Vera's gravity is nearly upset. Certainly she is an unfeeling little wretch, to be able to

laugh with everybody else so miserable, so she sternly represses a small grin, and heaves a sigh instead.

What shall she do with herself all this long wet day! Dora does not return, Eleanor goes upstairs; she is all alone in the big, silent house. What a dismal change two days have made. Perhaps Captain Dick will come back no more. It is not the rain that detains him in St. Ann's—ah! no, he is neither sugar nor salt to care for a drenching. He has been crossed in love, and is dying hard over there at the St. Ann's Hotel. Perhaps he will start for Central America, and never even come back to say good-by.

Vera is absurd, but she is none the less unhappy; she has unutterable sympathy for Captain Dick, she has a mild regret for Eleanor. She gazes forlornly at the rain, life's troubles are so much easier to bear, when the weather is propitious. And then there is sickness in the house, and it will seem unfeeling to sit down and practice. If one could only sleep all day! But one cannot, so, with another vast sigh, Vera gets up, goes for a book, and prepares to devote the long hours to literature.

Evening comes, and brings little change. It still rains, the sky looks sullen, the black surcharged clouds good for two days more of it. Mrs. Charlton descends to dinner, but Lot's wife, changed to a basaltic column, was never more frigid, more awful. Their host is unable to appear—he has been suffering martyrdom all day; even Dora, ministering angel that she is, can do little to assuage his anguish. The absent heir cometh not, but just before dinner, Daddy comes with a note. It is for Mr. Charlton, and is of the briefest——

"My Dear Governor:—Englehart came to-day, and is at the St. Ann's. He means to stay a week or two, to recruit, having been laid up lately. Knowing your prejudice, I will not, of course, bring him to Charlton, but shall remain with him here instead. Make my apologies to the ladies.

"Ever yours, R. C. F."

Mr. Charlton's face darkens heavily as he reads this. Naturally he is choleric, he hates to be thwarted; by temper he is imperious, although as yet his step-son has seen little of this. A man may be good-humored and hot-tempered easily enough at the same time. He has never very strongly opposed himself to Richard Ffrench as yet, he has been comparatively a poor man until of late, and never felt justified in coming between the lad and his whims. But now it is different. If Dick prefers this wandering Dr. Englehart to him, why then Dick must take the consequences. Dora has hinted something to him to-day, which he finds it difficult to believe—that Eleanor Charlton has refused him. Is the girl mad? He hardly knows how, but Dora's talk has irritated him to a most unusual degree against Richard. His illness, too, has made him nervous and excitable. The line must be drawn somewhere; he is prepared to take his stand here. Dick must pay some deference to his wishes; all he has, he is willing, nay anxious to give the boy. It is a noble inheritance. He loves him as he loves nothing else on earth, he wants him with him, and he must have him. He is growing old; it is only fair his son should stay with him, that there should be some return for so much lavish generosity and affection. It is a selfish monologue, partly engendered by irritating pain, partly by wily words of Dora. That is a charming little girl, he thinks—on the whole he begins to prefer her to Eleanor. He does not fancy young people under a cloud—then Eleanor has a mother, and as a permanence Mrs. Charlton is not to be desired.

Outside the rain pours steadily and monotonously—inside there are silent rooms and some gloomy faces. Dora's spirits never flag through the whole of it. She appoints herself sick-nurse, she writes letters, she reads aloud, her touch is soft and soothing, she never wearies, she manufactures her own sunshine, and brings it with her into the dim chamber of torture. If any earthly thing or creature could alle-

viate the agony of rheumatic gout—which they cannot—it would be Dora and her doings.

Night falls wet and starless—another morning dawns. Still the rain comes down persistently, doggedly, still the sky is lowering, still the surf roars and breaks over sand and shingle. Another long day for Vera to yawn through, and stare blankly out of blurred window-panes, to wander aimlessly about the house. She visits Eleanor in her chamber, but her visit is a dreary one. Dot is taken up with the sick seigneur, Mrs. Charlton is like a gorgon, these days, and the girl flies at her approach. Vera has heard of the evil eye, and ponders whether Eleanor's awful mother has not got it—a pair of them indeed. And where is Captain Dick? Oh! where, in all this world of rain, and wind, and mist, and misery, and love-sickness, and gout, is Captain Dick?

Another night, another day, and then her hero comes.

He comes after breakfast, looking little the worse for wear. His heart may be broken, but he has neither lost vigor nor good looks. On the contrary, he is brighter than when he left, and he greets Vera with the old pleasant, half mischievous smile.

Vera is glad, but a trifle disappointed all the same; it is better for him to take it in this way, but it is not the way the gentleman in Locksley Hall took it, or that other poetical party in Lady Vere de Vere. They scowled and gloomed, and abused their young women (in hexameters) for years after. If Dick is a hero it is his duty to behave as such.

Captain Ffrench has come to see his step-father, and is ushered by Dora into that dusk temple of pain, of which she has elected herself priestess. Mr. Charlton lifts a face all drawn and haggard with two days of torment.

"My dear governor," the young man says, leaning over the back of his sofa, "this is too bad. You so seldom have an attack of this kind in summer either. How did you rest last night? I trust the pain was not altogether unbearable."

"Rheumatic gout is *always* unbearable," answers Mr Charlton, angrily. "You need not ask how I rested, I never rested at all. I have not slept for three nights. Why don't you come home? what are you doing over there at St. Ann's? Is it not enough that I must be laid up by the legs, but you must desert our guests too?"

"I explained all that, you know, governor, in my note. Englehart is there——"

"Englehart be hanged! What have you to do with that wandering Ishmaelite? Send him to the dogs, and return home to your duty."

"That hardly sounds like you, sir—I don't think you quite mean it. He is partly on the invalid list, too, and only able to hobble with a stick. As to his being a wandering Ishmaelite, that is true enough, but, unfortunately, *I* am of the Ishmaelitish tribe as well."

"Have been, you mean. We have changed all that, if you remember."

"Governor," says Dick, in his most conciliating voice "that is what I have come especially to speak to you about. I gave no promise, that evening, you know, I only said I would try. I have tried—and it cannot be done."

Mr. Charlton half rises, and glances angrily at the young man. Pain and sleeplessness have almost changed his nature; he is morbidly irritable, and Dora's hints are rankling poisonously in his mind.

"What do you mean?" he demands.

"Don't be angry, governor. I am going with the Expedition."

Mr. Charlton is staring at him—a glassy stare of amaze and anger. He cannot for a moment take this in. He has made so sure of Richard—that half promise extorted, seems to have made his stay a certainty. And now to come and tell him deliberately that he is going——

"Don't be angry," Dick deprecatingly repeats, "I hate to

offend you—on my honor I do, sir. You are so uncommonly good to me—always have been—I cannot forget it, I never will forget it. But all the same, I want you to let me go. Say yes, this once, sir," he leans over him coaxingly, "and it shall be the last time. I promise you that."

"You will do precisely as you please," Mr. Charlton answers, suppressed passion in every tone. "I withdraw all claim upon you from this hour. You are eight-and-twenty—you are your own master. Only do not let us have any talk of goodness or gratitude; protestations don't count for much, when every action of your life gives them the lie."

Dick starts up, his face flushes dark red. He walks away, and begins pacing up and down.

"This is rather hard," he says, after a moment, "what am I to do? I wrote to Englehart resigning my commission, and he and the rest of the scientific corps refuse to accept. That is why he is here. He holds me to my pledge. What am I to do? I ask you, governor; in honor I stand bound. I have promised."

There is no reply. Mr. Charlton is so intensely angry that he is afraid to allow himself to speak.

"I cannot go from my word," Dick goes on, "they cannot fill my place at a moment's notice, and the Expedition cannot afford the inevitable delay. Come, sir!" he stops before him, and looks down, distressed pleading in his frank, honest eyes, "be reasonable. Consent to my going—it will be but for a year or two, at most, and then I bind myself to devote the whole remainder of my life to you."

"You are exceedingly kind; I am sixty-four years of age, and can count so confidently on many future years of life. No, sir, I refuse my consent. You must choose between Dr. Englehart and me, between Honduras and Charlton, and you must abide by your choice. Both you cannot have. Choose which you please, but remember your choice is for life.'

The calm young eyes look steadily down into the fiery old ones.

"Does that mean, sir, that when I say good-by it is for good and all? That I am to return here no more?"

"Exactly!" Mr. Charlton answers, and the fiery glance never flinches.

Dick draws a hard breath, turns, and resumes his walk. He is sincerely attached to his step-father, and feels this blow exceedingly.

"If you go with Dr. Englehart," Mr. Charlton says, his voice harsh with pain, "it will be because you prefer him to me; prefer your own roving fancy to my happiness or wishes. I make no claim upon you, you are free to go if you see fit. I have never thwarted you before—I am resolute now. If you go, in every way in which I can forget you, I will forget you—in every way in which I can blot your memory out, it shall be blotted out. You understand me, sir—in *every* way."

"You talk plainly, governor—I would be a blockhead indeed, if I did not understand."

"As to your promise to the scientific corps, that is rubbish. There are men who can fill your place, *not* only sons whose duty calls them at home. It is not your promise, but your inclination, that is taking you, and you know it."

Silence. Dick walks up and down, his hands in his pockets, with downcast and disturbed face. The elder man watches him keenly.

"And there is Miss Charlton," he resumes, "it strikes me your honor—this extremely nice and touchy honor of yours, Dick—is at fault there. You have paid her very marked attention, you have led her and her mother to believe you meant to marry her. Is it in accord with your high code, to pay such attention, and then desert the lady at the last moment? Or have you spoken and been rejected?"

Here is a quandary! What is he to say? If the truth, he

compromises Eleanor irretrievably as far as his father's testamentary intentions are concerned, and she is so poor, so poor. He takes his hands out of his pockets, and rumples up his hair, in a perfect fever of embarrassment and distress.

"It seems a difficult question to answer," says Mr. Charlton, sarcastically. "Well, don't perjure yourself, my lad. I know all about it. You asked and she refused—the jade!"

"Who told you that?"

"Never mind who. She is a fool, and must pay for her folly. But if you are leaving on her account——"

"Governor," says Dick, anxiously, "do not—do not, I beg, let this influence you against Miss Charlton. From first to last she never gave me the slightest encouragement. Do not hold her accountable for her mother's rash promises, for her mercenary hopes. Miss Charlton is the truest, noblest woman I have ever met, and—and you know her life—one 'demnition grind' the year round. Do not punish her for what she could not help. Be generous, sir, to this young lady!"

"Miss Charlton has made her choice," Mr. Charlton answers, coldly; "she too shall abide by it. We will not talk of this poor young lady, if you please—we will settle your affair. When does Dr. Englehart propose leaving St. Ann's?"

"In a few days—next week at the furthest."

"And you go with him?"

"I must. The Expedition starts on the twenty-fourth."

"You go with the Expedition?"

"It is inevitable. Be merciful, sir! I would rather cut off my right hand than deliberately offend you, but I stand pledged. My word has been given. I cannot retract."

"Very well. How much money do you want?"

"Sir!" Dick reddens through his brown skin.

"How much money do you want? I presume the scientific corps will not supply *all* your wants. Hand me my

check-book, if you please—I will give you a blank check which you can fill up at your leisure. And with it you will kindly consider our connection at an end. Any intentions I may have announced regarding the disposal of my property, so far as you are concerned, are from this moment withdrawn."

The flush fades from Dick's face, his lips set, his eyes flash, he stops in his walk, and regards the older man steadily.

"That taunt was not necessary, sir. Whatever opinion you may have held of me in the past, I do not think you ever believe the consideration of your fortune influenced any action of mine. And it never will. Bestow it upon whom you please—no one in the world has less right to it than I. I have but one parting favor to ask—that you will permit me to return once more to Charlton, and say a friendly farewell to *you*."

He takes his hat. He is very pale, and his eyes have a pleading look. He holds out his hand.

"Come, governor," he says, "we cannot part like this. I am afraid I look like an ungrateful dog, but—but I know how I feel. A fellow can't put that sort of thing into words, but by Jove I am sorry——"

He breaks off, and draws nearer. But Mr. Charlton, quite ghastly, between bodily pain and mental emotion, waves him away.

"Such a parting would be a farce. Come home to stay, and you know what sort of welcome awaits you. Go with your friend, and as my son I renounce you. There can be no half-way course."

"Then good-by, since it must be so."

He turns, opens the door, lingers yet one moment, in hope of some sign of relenting, but the invalid lies with closed eyes, spent and exhausted. And so Dick leaves him.

Is it fancy, or does he hear the rustle of skirts away from the door? He is too perturbed to tell, but a second after,

Dora's smiling little face looks out at him through another half-open door.

"Going again, Captain Ffrench? Will you not stay to luncheon? No? How unkind of you! How long is your tiresome friend going to keep you over in St. Ann's? Send him back to New York, and come home. We all miss you *so* much."

Dick smiles at the plaintive tone, and runs down-stairs. He distrusts this little woman—he knows she does not mean a word she is saying—he knows she dislikes him.

"Where is Miss Vera?" he asks.

"Waiting for you, somewhere. The child has been moping herself to death in your absence. In common humanity to her, you really ought to return. Do come back, Captain Ffrench!"

She waves her little white hand gayly, and trips away to the sick-room. The smile fades from Dick's face, he sighs impatiently, as he strides down the hall, and takes a last look at everything.

"It's uncommonly hard, by George!" he thinks moodily. "I hate like the deuce to row with the governor, but what am I to do? Englehart claims me, and he claims me, and whose claim is best? It's a muddle—ah! my little Vera! I was just going in search of you. Let me look at you. Why, you are actually looking pale. What is the matter?"

"Nothing," the girl says, all her great gladness in her shining eyes, "since *you* have come! How long you have been away, Captain Dick."

He smiles down into the artless child's eyes, pleased and soothed.

"Has it seemed long! It was the weather and not my absence, I'll wager a ducat. You would never have missed me if the sun had shone."

"Ah! you know better than that," Vera answers, heaving a sigh of vast content. How good, how pleasant, how com-

fortable it seems to have Captain Dick at home—to hear his deep tones, to see his lofty stature in this household of women. It gives the last touch to the perfection of her paradise. "If the sun, and moon, and stars, all shone together, I would miss you just the same."

"By Jove!" he says, and laughs, "how flattering. I thought my vanity had received its death-blow the other day, but——"

"I know what you mean," Vera interrupts, hastily. "Oh, Captain Dick," clasping her hands, "what will you think of me! I was there, I overheard all! At least I heard you—and Miss Charlton said—oh! don't be vexed, please!" imploringly, "I was asleep on the sofa, and the room was so dark, and you both came in while I was lying there, and didn't see me, and when I awoke you were talking and——"

A light breaks upon Dick. His face grows grave.

"And you told the gov—Mr. Charlton, Vera?"

"Oh, no, no! I told Dot—no, I didn't tell her—she found me sitting in the hall, and seemed to know all about it. I have wanted to tell you ever since. I never said a word to any one; I would not do anything so mean."

"Not even to Miss Charlton?"

"No. I think Eleanor is horrid—I can't bear her ever since. At least, I don't quite mean that, you know, I think she is just lovely, only——"

Captain Ffrench smiles again. The outspoken honesty and simplicity of this little girl have amused him from the first; her unconcealed fondness and admiration for himself, flatter him as a matter of course. Captain Dick is eminently mortal, and in no interesting little weakness above his sex.

"My dear little Vera!" you are the stanchest of friends, and the dearest little woman, without exception, in the world. I wonder now, if you will write to me, when I am down there among the silver mines. I am sure you write

charming letters—and tell me all about yourself and—yes—about Dot!"

Vera's eyes dilate—she stands still and looks up at him in blank, sudden terror.

"Down among the silver mines! What silver mines? You are not going away, Captain Ffrench?"

"Ah! but I am, and you will be a tall, fascinating young lady long before I come back. But you are not to forget me, mind. I shall look for those letters—— Why, Vera, my dear!"

She has turned away from him, and covered her face with her hands. The blow is so sudden, so sharp.

"Vera," he says, "my dear little Vera!" But she does not look up. "Why, my pet, are you so sorry as this! I did not think—Vera!" He tries to take her hands away, but she struggles and resists.

"Oh! don't," she says, in a stifled voice, "let me be. It—it isn't that!" struggling bravely, "I—I think I am nervous. It is the weather——"

"Of course it is the weather," he returns, promptly; "being shut up in the house so much, is enough to give any one the horrors. And it is a little—just a little—that you are sorry, too?"

"Oh! I am sorry! I am sorry! I am sorry!" she says, and breaks down. The last barrier gives way, and she sobs with all her heart.

There is only one sort of consolation for trouble of this kind, that Captain Dick knows of, and that is to take her in his arms, and give her a kiss. Words are failures. He is pleased, he is touched, he is embarrassed, he feels inclined to laugh. She is such a child, such a simpleton—not that he thinks her a simpleton—not at all. Such a tall child, too, up to his shoulder, now that they stand in this delicate proximity.

"Don't, Vera," he says, "please don't. If anybody came

There! let me wipe them away;" he takes out his handkerchief, and performs this needful office. "Don't cry any more. And you'll promise to write to me when I am gone?"

"Oh! yes, yes."

"And you won't forget me?"

"Oh! no, no." (A fresh flood.)

"And you will let Daddy take you out in the Nixie? It will do both you and the Nixie good."

"No!" Vera cries, "no! I will never set foot in the Nixie again! Oh! what must you think of me for crying like this. But it is so horrid to have p—p—people you like go away to hateful places, and n—n—never come back!"

"But I *am* coming back, my dear, in two years."

Two years! why not two centuries—in the eyes of sixteen are they not the same? Vera battles heroically, it does not become her to cry, though, to do her justice, the real concern she sees in Captain Dick's face is the more powerful motive. And yet that questionable smile of his lingers in his eyes.

"Well, now, Vera, it is all right again, isn't it? I am going. No, it is not good-by 'for good' this time—I shall be back. Get up early to-morrow—the rain is over for the present, and I and the Nixie will be waiting in the old place. We shall have half a dozen matutinal sails yet, before we say adieu."

Then he goes, and Vera is alone with her desolation. What will Charlton be without Captain Dick? All its green beauty will be but a fleeting show, for her illusion given. The Nixie, the island, the piano, the basket-carriage—all are filled with poignant memories. Why—why must he go? Why did this hateful man at the hotel ever come down? Why does not the earth open and swallow Honduras and all the silver mines in the world?

She goes slowly back to the house. The trail of the serpent is over everything; all—all recalls the lost one. In the hall she meets Eleanor, who starts to see the pale, tear

blotted cheeks, and reddened eyes of the bright little house fairy.

"Why, Vera," she says, and puts her arm about her, "my dear child what is the matter?"

But Vera strikes down the caressing hand, in a very fury of sudden passion.

"Do not touch me!" she cries, her black eyes blazing, "I hate you. He is going, and only for you he wouldn't have gone. I never want to speak to you again, as long as I live!"

She dashes away and up to her room, flings herself on her bed, and cries passionately.

Her great hero is going—after that the deluge. She will never see him again. Years from now, he may return, but where will she be. He will have forgotten her, and she likes him—oh! she likes him! she likes him——

"I wouldn't cry, if I were you," says the placid voice of Dora. She has entered unheard, drawn by the sound of vehement sobbing; "there is not a man on earth worth blearing one's eyes for, and not one of them all was won yet by crying. He will come back, my dear, and then if you really are so fond of——"

Vera starts up, goaded beyond endurance.

"What do you want here? Get out of my room, Dot! How do you know I am crying for—for him? I'm *not!* Go, and leave me alone."

And Dora, laughing to herself, goes. Vera is alone. And this is the end of her fairy tale. It keeps saying itself over and over in her mind—"And the prince went away to seek his fortune, and never, never, never came back."

CHAPTER XI.

SHADDECK LIGHT.

THREE days have gone by. To the casual observer they have brought little change, but changes there are. First and chief, Mr. Charlton's attack is going off; in a week he hopes to be about again. Next, the rain is over, and once more there is sunshine, and early rising on Vera's part, rows in the Nixie, and visits to Shaddeck. The agony of parting is inevitable, but it is yet two days off, and Vera never crosses her bridges until she comes to them. Captain Dick is still to be seen, to be heard, to be admired —next Thursday will surely come, but this is only Monday, and there are yet forty-eight hours, two thousand and eight hundred and eighty minutes between her and desolation.

It is the evening of Monday. Eleanor Charlton sits in her room—she spends most of her time there, of late, and looks out with dreary eyes over the fair summer prospect. She is at odds, it seems, with all the household, her mother most of all. For three days Mrs. Charlton has not spoken to her—she is the sort of person to live in the house with you, and not speak to you for a month. Not that, in a general way, this could be looked upon as a misfortune—rather the opposite—but it is sometimes an embarrassment. Dora is always pleasant; it is Dora's *rôle* to smile, and smile, and be a little villain; but from Dora, Eleanor has instinctively shrunk from the first. Dora's smiles are spurious currency, not sterling coin. Between her and Vera, a cloud hovers; it is six feet high, and answers to the name of Captain Dick.

Mr. Charlton, on the occasion of Eleanor's only visit, has received her with such chilling politeness, that she never had the heart to go near his study again. He knows all, and re-

sents her refusal. Captain Ffrench is going away, and she is responsible, it seems. Charlton is no longer a home, even a temporary home for her. She has thought the matter out, and made up her mind to go. She had intended to stay until the end of the month, but that is impossible now. Oh! if she could have but foreseen, and never come. She is paying dearly for her fidelity to one whom, deep down in her heart, she knows to be unstable as water, yielding as shifting sand. The knowledge is there, but she will not listen. Loyally she forces herself to hope, to trust, to believe in this man, to whom—how, she knows not—she has given her heart. She cannot recall the gift, because growing fear is upon her that he is unworthy, selfish, cowardly, self-indulgent, lazy. Circumstances are against him—it is not his will that is in fault—by nature he is indolent and without earnestness of purpose, and nature is an obdurate foe to fight. Time, age, love for her, will work wonders; so she forces herself to believe. She respects, admires, likes, esteems Richard Ffrench. *He* is in earnest; with all his might he does the thing which his hand finds to do. Life to him is no vapid, wearisome day, to be yawned through anyhow; he has energy, resolution, force of character, strength, all that she prizes most. If Ernest were but like him! And then, indignant with herself, she banishes the disloyal thought. Whatever Ernest is, he is hers. She has chosen, and she will be faithful to her choice.

It is a sultry and overcast evening. It has been at its hottest and fieriest all day; just now black clouds are rising, and there is that oppression in the air which betokens a thunder-storm. There is not a breath of wind stirring, nature stands motionless, bracing itself for the coming shock. Presently Eleanor rises, and goes to her mother's room. It is the hour before dinner, and she knows she will find her there. She is paler than usual, she has lost flesh and strength in the past week, she feels very little like the ordeal before

her. But it must be met, and Eleanor Charlton is not the woman to shrink plain duty.

Mrs. Charlton sits hem-stitching a fine pockethandkerchief; she does not deign to glance up as her daughter enters; her dumb familiar still holds possession of her.

"Mother," Eleanor says, plunging into the worst at once, "I am going away."

No reply; Mrs. Charlton stitches away with the steadiness of a machine.

"I am unhappy here; I have displeased Mr. Charlton, offended Captain Ffrench, and angered you. It is impossible for me to stay. I am sorry I came—sorrier than sorry; nothing remains for me but to leave at once."

Silence. An angry red is rising over Mrs. Charlton's large fleshy face, but her lips only tighten into a tenser line.

"I have money sufficient to pay my travelling expenses," Miss Charlton steadily goes on. She knows her mother, and this speechless form of sulks, too well to be surprised. "You need not necessarily shorten your stay before the beginning of September; no one can blame you for my acts. I am very sorry, mother, sorry that I have pained our kind host, sorry to have disappointed you; but I could not have acted otherwise. I will leave on Thursday morning, and will inform Mr. Charlton of my resolution to-day. He will not object to my going, he will see that it is inevitable."

Still mute. If Mrs. Charlton were deaf and dumb she could not give less sign that she hears. Words are useless; has she not tried again, and again, and yet again, threats, scoldings, denunciations, commands, entreaties, tears. She has run up and down the whole gamut—in vain. Of what use is it to waste eloquence on such a heartless, undutiful daughter as this?

"If you would but forgive me, mother," Eleanor says, wistfully, and at the words, as flint strikes fire from steel, the spell is broken, and the infuriated woman blazes forth:

"I will never forgive you!" see cries, "never, so help me Heaven! I will never forgive you in life or in death!"

* * * * * * * * *

In her bedroom, Vera stands before the glass putting the last touch to her dinner dress, and eyeing herself with extreme disapproval. How thin and long her face is, to be sure, how unnecessarily like black saucers her eyes, how particularly unlike a rosebud her mouth, how excessively unclassical her nose, how idiotically low her forehead, how yellow, and sallow, and ugly her complexion! No, her *skin*—Dot has a complexion, Vera a skin. What a black, kinky, untidy brush, her hair. Yes! she is one of the tribe of Ugly Ducklings, and never, never, will she transmogrify into a swan. Ah! no; sallow skin, thin cheeks, crane neck, tar black hair, owl eyes—that is to be the melancholy record to the bitter end! With a great sigh she turns away from the mirror. Hitherto her looks have troubled her very little; she has accepted the fact that she is a colored person, and not a good-looking colored person either, as one of the great incontrovertible facts of life, but of late this painful truth has been brought home to her, in an altogether new and depressing light. If she were only the least little bit pretty! If she only had the least little flesh on her bones! Vera is sadly conscious that she has an abnormal tendency to bones. If she only had red cheeks, a Grecian nose, anything, anything. But she has not an atom of prettiness about her. She is rank, she is bony, she outgrows her clothes, she is dark and colorless, she always will be, and—and what a homely little mortal Captain Dick must think her.

"I think I look like Daddy," muses Vera, gazing mournfully at what she sees in the glass. "I really think I have a family resemblance to Daddy. Perhaps that is why Captain Dick takes pity on me, and makes much of me. He does the same with Daddy. Daddy's wrists and ankles protrude

unpleasantly from his clothes—so do mine. Daddy has a complexion like a tallow candle—so have I. Daddy runs frightfully to joints and knuckles—so do I. Yes, I am enough like Daddy to be a long-lost sister."

She turns away disgusted, goes to the window, leans her folded arms on the sill, and gazes disconsolately out. And yet that Creole face, framed in green leaves, a dark-red ribbon in the "tar mop," would hardly be pronounced an ugly one by most observers. Those two velvet, black, soft, deep, lustrous eyes would redeem any countenance, and despite the sallowness, and the thinness of a rapidly growing girl, there are the serene lines of beauty of no common order. In spite of her own opinion, she is exactly the sort of Ugly Duckling that is certain to grow into a handsome swan.

How hot it is! That is the only idea she has been conscious of all day. It has been a blank day, blank from its very beginning. For some reason Captain Dick was not at the place of tryst, this morning, and Vera and the Nixie were left at their moorings lamenting. The house has been dull as death, the people gloomy, the day hot. She always comes back to that; her mind goes round in a circle, and always returns to its starting-point—the heat.

"Perhaps I am falling into my second childhood," thinks Vera, despondently; "I have heard of such things. If the weather makes dogs go mad, why shouldn't it make people idiotic? And oh! how hot and hateful the whole world will be after Thursday afternoon."

She sighs impatiently, and stares with gloomy eyes over the prospect. How lovely she thought it three weeks ago; what a blank, hollow, unsatisfactory sort of a thing it is to-day! What is the use of a place being lovely, if people will not stay in it? Why was Central America ever discovered? It was some of Christopher Columbus' work, she supposes—these navigators and discoverers are certainly very officious and much overrated people. Oh! dear *how* hot it is!

and those black clouds up there; of course it is going to lighten and thunder, nothing will do it but that.

Vera is mortally afraid of lightning and thunder, she always takes refuge in the cellar if there is one available, her eyes hermetically sealed, her ears corked with her index fingers. As if she were not unhappy enough without having to spend the evening in a cellar! Oh! how hot—then she stops. The little basket phaeton, with its blue umbrella top, comes briskly up the drive, with Dora inside. Dora has been to town on an errand for Mr. Charlton, and is now returning. How pretty she looks, Vera thinks, in that white chip hat, and ostrich tips, and blush roses, a flimsy white vail strapped across her delicate morsel of a nose, her rose-lined parasol casting a warm tint over her too pale face. Ah! where are Captain Dick's senses, that he has no relish for golden hair, pearly skin, azure eyes, and a fairy form. Then Dora looks up, and sees her.

"Oh, Vera!" she exclaims. There is unusual animation in Dora's look and tone, "have you heard?"

"I have heard nothing," says Vera, in a melancholy voice, "seen nothing, done nothing, and never expect to again. What is it?"

"Captain Ffrench——"

Vera starts up, all listlessness, all mild melancholy gone, at that magical name.

"Captain Ffrench has met with an accident—I heard it over at St. Ann's, and is very badly hurt."

There is a cry; a sharp, sudden cry, as if she had been struck. Then Vera is motionless, but in that instant every trace of life and color has faded from her face.

"He was out driving," pursues Dora, airily, "with that man, Dr. Englehart, you know, and it seems the horses took fright at a passing train, and started off at a gallop. The carriage was overturned, in spite of all Captain Ffrench's efforts, and they were both thrown out. Dr. Englehart

escaped scot-free, but the poor overgrown Dick has broken himself somewhere, his arm, or his shoulder, or his neck—I really am not sure which."

There is no reply. Vera kneels as she was, the same, yet different. Rigid now, her hands locked, her face blanched, her eyes all blind and black with great swift horror. She does not try to speak, she just kneels there, and stares blankly down at the speaker.

"Vera! Why, good Heaven! You little idiot! I believe you are going to faint!"

She darts into the house, up the stairs, flies swiftly into Vera's room, and seizing her by the shoulders, shakes her with no gentle hand.

"You little fool! if you faint I will never forgive you. I tell you he is not dead—more's the pity—such great hulking fellows as that, in everybody's way, don't die so easily. He has put his shoulder out, that is all. Now come back to life, or I will shake all there is left out of you!"

She is quite white with anger and alarm. Vera lifts her eyes, into which the old look slowly returns.

"I thought he was killed," she says, in a whisper.

"Oh! you thought, you thought!" retorts Dora, crossly, "a nice fright you have given me for nothing. My heart is beating like a trip-hammer. It serves me right for telling you anything about it. I might have known what a perfect simpleton you are."

"Oh! Dot, don't. Where is he, please?"

"Where he ought to be—out of everybody's way, in his hut in the ocean."

"Alone?"

"He has that other lunatic with him—his *protégé*, Daddy Long Legs."

"Dot, tell me, is he badly hurt?"

"How do I know? What do I care? I only hope it won't prevent his going off on Thursday. Oh! you may

look at me as you please ; I detest your Captain Dick. Now I'm going to tell Mr. Charlton."

She leaves the room. For a little Vera lingers, a weight like lead on her heart. Captain Dick hurt, badly hurt, suffering pain, alone there in Shaddeck Light. What if it is worse than Dora knows, what if he dies ! At that thought she starts to her feet and puts out both arms as if to ward off some direful blow.

"Oh, no, no !" she cries, "not that ! Oh ! what shall I do ? What shall I do ?"

She stands twisting her fingers, bewildered by pain and terror. The heat, the coming thunder-storm, his departure, all are forgotten, swallowed up in this new dread disaster.

What shall she do ? Go down when the bell rings and eat her dinner ? No, that is impossible. Alone there with only Daddy ! Oh, if he were but at home, if she could only do something—only tell him she was sorry. Captain Dick helpless and suffering. How strange a thought, how impossible to take it in. He so strong, so manly, so full of life and vigor ; it seems as if pain, or weakness, or helplessness could never come near him.

What shall she do ? She takes up her hat mechanically, and goes out of the house. The closeness of the air seems to stifle her ; the lurid sky is shutting down over the silent world, as the dungeon roof shut down upon the fated prisoner in the "Iron Shroud." If she could but do something —anything ! To think of his being there alone, with no one to do anything for him but that stupid Daddy. The thought gives her a pang of absolute physical pain.

She is out on the high road, now. All the world has come to a stand-still, the leaves on the trees, the flowers at her feet, the birds in the branches, the sea afar off. Is nature waiting breathlessly for the first crash of the storm, or has it gone into mourning, like Vera's heart ? Dark clouds are rapidly gathering, but she never heeds them—she who so

fears storms—she goes on and on, faster, unheeding the heat, driven by "some spirit in her feet," without will of her own, and here at last, breathless, flushed, panting, she stands on the shore, and looks across the mile or so of water, at Shaddeck Light.

The tide is ebbing. In half an hour—in less—it will be possible to walk over, but Dr. Englehart is there, and even in her great trouble, she is shy of facing a strange man. It is a comfort, a poor one, but a comfort, to stand here with longing wistful eyes fixed on that smallest of human habitations. Overhead the clouds are still blackening, the sea moans dully, now and then, as if sullenly conscious of what is in store for it. And still Vera stands. She will be drenched to the skin, she will be blinded by the lightning, she will be deafened by the thunder, she will be frightened out of her few remaining senses, if she lingers half an hour longer. And yet it is hard to turn and go. Her anxiety, her sympathy are so great that in some mesmeric way they ought to reach him from here. Ah! here is Daddy! long-limbed, blessed Daddy! At last she will hear of our hero.

Daddy comes shambling over the rocks, looking much as usual. He is attached to his master, with a dull, doggish sort of attachment, but he is also of a phlegmatic turn, and this upsetting of all things works no apparent outward change. If Vera's eyes were twice as piercing, they could read nothing in that blank page—his face.

"How is he?" she cries, springing forward. "Oh, Daddy, how is Captain Ffrench?"

Daddy eyes her stolidly, and does not quicken his customary drawl.

"Waal, I guess thar ain't no change to speak on. He's kinder pooty much the same. Air you a goin' over? Dew; 'twill perk him up quite some."

"Daddy," Vera demands with solemnity, "Daddy, I ask you—will he, or will he not die?"

Thus put upon oath, as it were, Daddy considers with profound seriousness.

"Waal, I reckon not," is his conclusion. "I'm a goin' for some doctor's stuff over to the town, and kent stay."

"Is Dr. Englehart with him, Daddy?"

Daddy shakes his head, and shuffles off, and again Vera is alone. Shall she go? He is there and suffering; she can return before the tide rises. Yes, she will go. She knows her way over those slippery, sea-weedy rocks, she has crossed the bar many a time, but never so quickly, so fleetly as now. In a few minutes she is in front of the cottage, the handle of the door in her hand. She turns it gently, and enters. The darkness of the nearing storm is in the room; its bareness, its loneliness strikes the girl with a sense of pain altogether new. What a desperate place to be ill in—ill and alone.

Captain Ffrench is asleep. He lies on the lounge, his head pillowed on his right arm, his left bandaged and helpless. It is his arm then that is broken. How pale he is; how deeply he sleeps. Vera shuts the door, tiptoes over anxiously and stands gazing at him. He does not look as though he were going to die, certainly—nobody dies of a broken arm, or a shoulder put out. And it may detain him; a person cannot go to Central America winged in this way. A great throb of hope stirs within her; if the accident keeps him will it not be a thing to rejoice at after all!

Her steady gaze disturbs him; he stirs impatiently, and mutters to himself. Vera leans down, smiling, to hear what he is saying. As she does so, he opens his eyes, stares, shuts them, reopens them, and stares again.

"By Jove!" he says, in amaze.

"Yes, it is me," says Vera, joyously, discarding grammar in her gladness, "I have just come. Oh! Captain Dick, how glad I am, how glad I am!"

"Glad!" exclaims Captain Dick, aghast.

"Yes, glad that it is only your arm. I thought it was so

much worse. You don't know how frightened I was——' Vera stops with one impassionate little gesture. Mere words will tell so little of all that is in the heart.

"You dear little soul!" says Captain Dick, sitting up and holding out his hand. "And you came here the moment you heard of it, I'll be bound."

"Yes," replied Vera, "I did not know—Dot did not know—Daddy did not seem to know what it was. And it seemed so dreadful for you to be alone and in pain here. Is it your arm, or your shoulder, and oh, does it hurt you *very* much?"

He does not answer for a moment. He smiles, and holds her hands, and sits looking at her with a look Vera does not understand.

"You were frightened and sorry, and you ran here at once. Little Vera! Little Vera! what a trump you are!"

"And it is not very, *very* bad!" persists Vera, sticking to business, and ignoring compliments.

"Not now; it hurt like the deuce at first, although the shoulder is only strained, not dislocated. Those horses pulled like a pair of devils. But it is all right now, or will be in a day or two, and it would be worth while having a whole arm amputated for such a proof of fidelity as this. Find a chair and sit down. Who told you about it in the first place?"

"Dot. She was in town, and heard there."

"Does the governor know?"

"Dot will tell him."

"How did you come? But you walked, of course."

"Of course. The tide is out, and I must not stay or it will be in."

"Oh, there is no hurry; it won't be in for hours. I was confoundedly lonely until I fell asleep. Englehart has gone back to New York; had to go—unexpected telegram—so your visit, a god-send at any time, is doubly a god-send at

present. Take off your hat—yes, I insist—Daddy will be back, presently, and we will have a sociable supper together. The tide? Never mind the tide; I will send him for the Nixie, and he can row you ashore."

Vera laughs and obeys. She takes a chair, throws her hat on another, and the simple action is the turning-point of her life.

CHAPTER XII.

AN EVENING AT SHADDECK LIGHT.

"BUT why did you come here?" inquires Vera, "such a lonesome, lonesome place to be sick in, Captain Dick."

"*I* am not sick," returns Captain Dick, "and don't intend to be, little Vera."

"Why did you not go to Charlton?" persists Vera, "it is dreadfully out of the way here, with nobody but Daddy too, while over there we are so many, with nothing at all to do. We could read to you, and sing to you, and make you nice things——"

"Don't," says Captain Ffrench, "don't Vera, I beg. I am but mortal; don't madden me by recalling all I have lost. Don't make me feel any more like the peri outside of Paradise than you can help. *You* are coming to see me every day while I am here; yes, and you will read to me and talk to me, and sing for me, and for the rest—well, I must bear it. You know, I cannot go back to Charlton."

"Why not?"

"Ah! well, never mind why," answers Dick with a very sincere sigh; "I and the dear old governor have had a mis-

understanding, and—and, in short, I am not to go back. Still I think I shall venture once, to bid you all good-by."

"You will really go then, in spite of all this?" touching the wounded arm, her heart sinking suddenly.

"In spite of all this. It would take a good deal more than a crippled arm to keep me from Honduras. I shall have time and to spare, to recover, on the way. I shall lie on the deck, Vera, and smoke, and think of you, and wonder what you are about in the sunny September days."

"Ah!" says Vera, "I can tell you what I will be about, very easily. I shall be back in New York, in the dull old schoolroom, teaching piano scales, and words of two syllables all day long. Mrs. Trafton—'my missis,' you know—brings Floss and Lex home early in the month, and, of course I must be there."

She pushes all the soft dark rings of hair from her forehead, with a restless sigh. How hopeless it all looks, that dreary school-room, up three pair, after the brightness and freedom of Charlton and Captain Dick. How monotonous the routine of Second Readers, and "one, two, three, four," after the sails, the drives, the woodland walks; how deadly dull the tiresome gabble of the children, after the brilliant conversational powers of——

"Oh!" she cries out, in a voice full of impatient pain, "how horrid it all is; the city, and the noise, and the ugliness, and the dreary old round of lessons over and over, forever and ever."

He looks at her in pity. She is such a child; it is like caging a poor little forlorn starling, this cooping her up with school-books and black-boards.

"What a shame!" he says, "I wish I could take you with me to Central America. You would like that, would you not, Vera?" Like it? Her eyes flash with quick delight. She laughs, then sighs. "And Floss and Lex," he goes on, "who are they! My lady's pair of pet poodles?"

"Poodles!" indignantly; "they are Alexis and Flossilla Trafton, nine and eight years old, and two of the nicest little things. I suppose it is wicked of me to be discontented. Mrs. Trafton is ever so good to me, and the children love me; but I do not like teaching; I ought to be at school myself I know nothing at all. You see it all happened when I was so young—only ten, Captain Dick," lifting two pathetic young eyes.

"Yes, dear," he says, tenderly, "tell me about it. You lost your father, I know."

"I was twelve when papa died. He was killed in the second year of the war. Dot was over twenty then—she is only my half-sister, you know."

"By the by," says the captain, struck by a sudden thought, "what is your name, Vera? Not Lightwood, I know. Curious, that in all this time I have never heard your name."

"My father was a Cuban," Vera answers, "his name was Martinez—Manual Salvador Martinez. I was christened after his mother, Veronica Mary."

"Veronica Mary. Then I have the honor of addressing the Doña Véronique Maria Martinez?"

Vera nods.

"I am Vera to everybody, and all who know Dot call me Vera Lightwood. My grandmother Martinez lives in Cuba yet, and they say is very rich. She was angry with papa for marrying mamma, and never would speak to him, or write to him after. When he died, she wrote for the first time—such a cold, proud letter—offering to take me. Mamma had lost her fortune then, it was invested in Southern bonds, or something, and our house was burned in Sherman's march. Ah! it was a dreadful, dreadful time. I was a child, but I remember it all so well. It killed poor mamma. And to think that *you* were one of those Yankee soldiers I used to fear and hate so much!"

"I was not in Sherman's army, and so never helped to

burn your home, thank Heaven! Yes, it was a stirring, glorious, terrible time. And so your mother would not let you go to Grandmamma Martinez and the Ever-Faithful Isle!"

"No, but I think if she had known she was to die so soon, she would. We were left so poor, so desolate, so utterly alone."

"She died suddenly?"

"In one moment, Captain Dick. When they told her papa was wounded, she went to him, and stayed until he died. He died in a week—torn all to pieces," Vera says, in a whisper, her dark eyes dilating, "by a shell. Then she came home. We did not see much difference, she was always pale and delicate, like Dot, but she never laughed nor talked as she used, or took any notice of me, who used to be her pet; and one day as she was talking to Miss Scudder, she just laid her hand on her heart, gave one gasp, and fell back in her chair, dead!"

There is silence. Outside the darkness is ever deepening, around them the sea is sullenly washing, fit background for Vera's tragic tale.

"It was heart-disease," she goes on, after a moment, during which she has covered her face, with a sob, "and (Dot would not like me to tell this) she will not talk of it, nor think of it, but she has it too. It is hereditary in our mother's family, and some day I am afraid——"

She stops; her large eyes look larger and blacker, Ffrench thinks, than he has ever thought them before.

"I would die, I think, if anything happened to Dot. I have nobody but her in the world. Captain Dick, you know so much, do you think—*do* you think Dot will ever go like that?"

"I think not, I hope not, I am sure not," he answers, 'my poor little Vera!"

He is so sorry for her, she is such a childish little soul to be thrown on the world, to fight its bitter battles, to know of

such grisly horrors as these. He has never had a sister, never thought whether he wished for one before; but he wishes now that this little girl with the dark appealing eyes, and winsome, innocent ways, were his sister.

"Then," goes on Vera, "we were all alone, and homeless, and poor. Only for Miss Scudder, an old maid cousin of mamma's, who kept our house, I don't know what would have become of us. But the next two years passed somehow. The war was at an end, we were still without a home, and poor, poor, poor!"

She breaks off. A great flash of lightning blazes out, followed by a dull roaring cannonade. The storm is upon them in its might. She shrieks, and covers her eyes.

"Don't be afraid," Dick says, reassuringly, "what! such a little heroine frightened by a thunder-storm? Come, sit with your back to the window, and go on. You do not know how interested I am."

The crash is over; it is so dark they can hardly see each other's faces. Captain Ffrench takes her two hands in one of his, and holds them fast.

"Now," he says, cheerily, "not all the powers of earth and air, not all the king's horses, nor all the king's men, shall harm you. What next? What did you and Dot do then?"

"Before the war," says Vera, creeping up close to her protector, "we had had a governess. When it first broke out papa sent her home North, but she had left us her address, and Dot wrote to her, asking her to help us. She wrote back at once, the kindest letter. She had married, during those four years, a very rich banker, a Mr. Trafton, and she invited us to her house, and inclosed money to pay our way. Now was that not kind?"

"Very kind. The world is not such a bad sort of place after all as the cynics try to make it out. Now, now, now! never mind the lightning."

"But it is so awful. Captain Dick, what would we do if it struck this house and set it on fire?"

"It wont strike," he laughs, "I am a non-conductor. Well, you went to Mrs. Trafton's?"

"We went to Mrs. Trafton's, and nobody could have been kinder. Mr. Trafton had been a widower, and Lex and Flossy were two little tots no bigger than that, but they took the greatest fancy to me at once—you can't think!"

"Can't I? It has been exactly my own case. I stood on the bank, that morning, and looked down on the dearest little black-eyed fairy in the world, and fell in love with her on the spot."

"Now you are laughing at me. If you are——"

"I am perfectly serious. My case and that of Lex and Flossy are precisely parallel."

"Well, whether you are laughing or not they *did*, and Mrs. Trafton proposed that I should stay partly as playmate, partly as governess, at a small salary. Such a ridiculous governess, Captain Dick, only fourteen!"

"And there you are ever since?"

"Ever since, and likely to be, until the children are old enough for a governess who knows something. *I* know nothing, nothing," says Vera, with a melancholy little shake of the head.

"What becomes of Doña Martinez, then?"

"Ah, what? goodness knows. I have a talent for cooking; I might go out as kitchen-maid. I suppose Mrs. Trafton will get something for me; she is awfully good. But I do hate teaching."

"You poor little soul!" Captain Ffrench is aware that he has several times already used this form of consolation, and that it would be well to vary it, but it seems to fit the case as well as anything else.

"And Dot hates millinery; I mean she hates being a lay figure, and trying on, and showing things to vulgar rich peo

ple, who would be insolent if they could, only Dot never takes airs nor insolence from anybody. But it is a stupid life all round, and in the long hot summer time, and the dull winter days—— But there! what is the use of talking about it. Poor we are, and poor we will be till the end of the chapter. Sometimes I wish Mr. Charlton had not invited us here. It makes the going back so much worse."

"I wish Mr. Charlton would keep you for good. It would be a capital arrangement on both sides. If things were as they used to be between us, I would ask him. Ah! by Jove! that *was* a crash!"

A crash indeed. It shakes the light-house, the rocks under it, the mighty ocean itself. And then a blaze of blue sulphurous light zig-zags through the room, and Vera screams and buries her face on his shoulder. He draws her close, and does his best to soothe her, but he can feel her quivering with fear.

"It will not hurt you, you are perfectly safe. Vera! why you poor child, how your heart is beating. How sorry I am you came."

That rouses her a little.

"I—I am not sorry," she gasps, "it would be just as bad over at the house. Oh, Captain Dick, I am always frightened to death in thunder-storms. Do you--*do* you think it will soon be over?"

"It will be over in fifteen minutes," returns Captain Dick, in the positive tone of one who always has his information from headquarters, "and, meantime, neither the thunder, nor the lightning, nor twice the hurly-burly will harm us. Hark! there is the rain. It is only a summer shower after all. Our cyclone will be over in a moment now."

And in a very few minutes it *is* over. There is a torrent of rain, a few more vivid flashes, a few more rumbling peals, and then the spirit of the storm draws off his forces, growling sullenly as he goes. There is but the furious pour of the

rain, and as Vera does not fear that, she lifts her diminished head, and, rather ashamed of herself, looks in a somewhat crest-fallen fashion at her companion.

"What a goose you must think me, Captain Dick. But I can't help it. I have always been like this. I wonder," suddenly, "what keeps Daddy?"

"The storm, I suppose. He doesn't like a wetting any more than his betters."

"And the tide is turning!" cries the girl going to the window, "it must be nine o'clock. Captain Dick, the tide is turning."

"Let it turn. What is the tide to you and me?"

"But how am I to get off? how am I to go home?"

"Daddy will fetch you. He will come off in a boat presently, and then, after supper, can row you ashore. Come, don't grow anxious, it will be all right."

"Well—if you think so—you are sure Daddy will come?"

"Quite certain."

"Because if he did not you know I could walk it. The bar is still clear——"

"And the rain is still pouring in bucketfuls. Yes, it is so likely I will let you walk. I'll tell you what you *may* do, little Vera: does my memory serve me, or did I dream you owned to a genius for cooking?"

"I own to it. It is my one talent."

"And you are not afraid of blacking your hands?"

"Not a bit. Nature has made them so black that art nor soot cannot spoil them."

"Very well then. Yonder is the kitchen. In the kitchen is a stove, in the stove is a fire, left by forehanded Daddy. On sundry shelves are various articles of tin and crockery appertaining to the cuisine. In different canisters are coffee, tea, milk, etc. Now, suppose, while we wait, you get up our supper. I am consumedly hungry. And if

you prove to have the culinary skill you claim, when I return from Central America, with my fortune made, I may engage you as my cook."

Vera needs no second bidding. She goes to the kitchen in high glee. The invalid proposes accompanying her, and superintending, but this she will not hear of. A true artist permits no interference—an artist in cooking least of all He is to remain on his lounge and smoke, if he likes, and issue no orders, and prepare to be enchanted with the result.

The lightning has quite ceased; the rain is ceasing. Great rifts in the clouds show gleams of yellow light. It is nine, but still not entirely dark, and by and by there will be a moon. Daddy can row her ashore by moonlight, and in spite of the storm this will be an evening to dream of, when Captain Dick—ah! mournful thought—is far away.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NIGHT AT SHADDECK LIGHT.

THE Doña Véronique Maria Martinez bustles about among the crockery and canisters mentioned by the master of the house, making coffee, frying ham, cutting bread and making toast. Captain Richard Ffrench lies at ease, half smiling as he watches the busy little figure flitting about. And the August evening wears, and the August night comes trailing darkly, spangled with stars, over the world. A cool wind rises, the sea washes up, in steady deep pulses, the minutes fly, and Daddy comes not. He pulls out his watch at last. "Nine," he says, with a start.

"Daddy should be here. What *can* keep the fool? What a pretty pickle if the Doña should have to stay all night—if Daddy does not come at all."

But this catastrophe he does not greatly fear. Daddy always comes; he is badgered by the gamins of St. Ann's whenever he shows in the streets; he will not fail in this crisis. The druggist and the tempest combined have detained him. And then Vera appears in the door-way freighted with a large tray, the odors from which are as nectar and ambrosia, and twice as substantial. This she places on a table, wheels it up to the invalid's couch, lights a lamp, and sets it in the middle. She arranges her edibles, and takes her seat to preside, issuing her orders with the pretty peremptoriness of an amateur matron.

"No, you are not to stir, Captain Dick. I can do everything myself and prefer it. Just keep still, and do as you are told. Here is your coffee—does it not smell deliciously?"

"The perfume of Araby the Blest—and the taste—words fail. Consider yourself engaged from this moment as head-cook of my future establishment."

"Let me help you to ham, and try this toast. Is your coffee sweet enough? How funny it seems, this gipsy supper out here in the middle of the sea, doesn't it?"

"Ah! very funny!" Then mentally: "What the dickens keeps Daddy?"

"If Dot only could see us—or Mrs. Charlton. Good gracious! Mrs. Charlton would be shocked out of her seven senses."

"Why? We are doing no harm."

"That makes no difference. It isn't the things that are most harm that shock people most," says Vera, with unconscious knowledge of the world. "Another cup of coffee? I knew you would like it."

"Never tasted its like at the Café de Paris." Half-past

nine—he pulls out his watch surreptitiously. "Good heavens! will that half-witted clown never come!"

"By the way," he says, "and apropos of nothing—Dot knows where you are, of course?"

"Yes—no—I don't believe she does. I didn't tell her. I didn't know I was coming. She told me about your accident, and I forgot everything but that, and ran off. Have another piece of toast? Is not Daddy very long about coming?"

"I should think so," replies Captain Dick, with an ill-repressed groan. He is growing seriously uneasy. More than once it has happened to Daddy to be belated and kept in St. Ann's all night—what if this be one of the nights! The tide is making too rapidly now for her to think of crossing to the main land, and if Daddy does not bring a boat——

"Any more ham? No? Well, this is a promiscuous picnic; I shall never forget it. Now, I will clean off the things, and then there will be nothing to do but sit down and wait for Daddy and the boat."

"Nothing to do! Good Heavens!" Captain Ffrench says to himself again, in direst dismay.

It is close upon ten now, and still only the wash of the surf on the rocks breaks the dread silence of night and ocean. The rising moon streams in and fills the little room, for his cook-elect has taken the lamp to the kitchen. He goes to the window and looks out.

"Sister Anne, Sister Anne, do you see anybody coming?' cries Vera, gayly. Her work is done, and waiting is begun. "Water, water, everywhere, but no Daddy visible. Captain Dick, what if he doesn't come at all?"

"By Jove!" he says, and looks at her so blankly that she breaks into a laugh.

"Would it not be awful? And Mrs. Charlton's face when I go back! No—it is too fearful to think of!" She laughs again—Vera's sweet, joyous laugh, no thought of the real

awkwardness, the serious *contretemps*, breaking on her mind. "Captain Dick, you should have let me walk home."

"But I thought Daddy would come—I made sure Daddy would come!" he murmurs, helplessly. He goes back to his couch, and pulls his long mustache in dire perplexity. "Confound Daddy!—yea, trebly hang and confound him! What can keep the great softy? If the child has to stay all night——" He looks at her sitting there with all a child's unconsciousness in her face. "It will be the deuce of a scrape! And what will they say at Charlton? What will Eleanor say?—and her awful mother?—and the governor? and Dora?"

Vera is singing softly to herself. The stars are shining down on the sleeping sea; the moon is pouring its white, lonesome light over everything; nothing but the world of waters around them—Adam and Eve in Eden were never more alone.

"The night has a thousand eyes,"

sings Vera, her head thrown back, her upraised eyes fixed on the glittering sky—

"The day but one,
Yet the light of the bright world dies
With the dying sun.

"The mind has a thousand eyes,
The heart but one;
Yet the light of a whole life dies
When day is done."

Half-past ten! With the moonlight full on her face, she sits in the old arm-chair, the sea-wind lifting her short curls, drinking in the solemn loveliness of the night. There is silence. He lies gnawing his mustache, vexed, puzzled, powerless to help himself. How anxious they will be at Charl-

ton. How unconcerned *she* seems; singing, too, by George! He is half inclined to resent that ignorance of innocence. But, after all, what cannot be cured must be endured—care killed a cat—it is really no fault of his; she is only a little girl, and—eleven!

The night is so still; what wind there is, is blowing towards them, and the clock of St. Ann's Town Hall has a loud bass voice. Eleven! Still silence. Vera's song has died out, Captain Ffrench has given up the forlorn hope at last.

"'He cometh not,' she said," quotes Vera, in tones of subdued tragedy.

"I—I'm afraid not. I'm awfully sorry, little Vera. What must you think of me? It is all my fault—you could have walked. I never imagined it would end like this."

The intense vexation of his tone is not to be concealed. She looks at him in surprise. Of what he is thinking—of the way the predicament may affect her—she never dreams.

"But, after all, there is no great harm done. I am safe, and it is better for me to be here than that you should be left alone. Dot will guess where I am, and the rest will not care. I suppose the tide will go out again early in the morning, and then I can walk ashore."

There is no more to be said. He accepts the situation as it is his custom to accept the inevitable, and throws off all care for the morrow. To-night his duty is to make his guest as comfortable as may be, to-morrow must take care of itself. Her sister will understand, and as Vera herself says, it is no one else's business. No one need ever know—she can cross about seven in the morning, and be home in time for breakfast. So Captain Dick cheers up, throws off worry, and becomes hospitably solicitous about her night's rest.

"You cannot sit there until morning, you know," he says. "Daddy has a roost under the eaves. I will mount, and

you must try and make yourself as comfortable as may be down here. You need fear no burglars, and sea-pirates don't fish in Shaddeck Bay. After all, it will not be half a bad adventure to look back on, in the monotony of the Trafton school-room. Don't get nervous; don't let the sound of the sea frighten you. Remember there will be a sweet little cherub up aloft ready to fly down at the faintest call. And now, as it is high time you were sound, I will ascend. Good-night and pleasant dreams, little Vera."

Vera protests—he will hurt his shoulder. She is very comfortable, thank you, in this chair. She will go up under the Mansard instead. In vain—on this point he is inflexible, and goes while she is politely persisting. No need of shooting bolts or burglars, of locking doors, or barring casements at Shaddeck Light. He is gone, and Vera and the moonlight are alone.

Alone! How lonely it is—she has never realized fully what the word meant before. How awe-inspiring in its solemn, sighing mystery, that sleeping sea, how desolate the eternal wash of the slow breaking surf, how mournful the echo of the night wind! Now and then there is the dissonant scream of a gull—nothing else of life to break upon the voices of the night. Moonlight and water, water and moonlight—their dot of an island, their speck of a house! St. Ann's, a long, dark line of coast, with here and there a glimmering light, and she alone in all the world, as it seems, alone as Peter Wilkins on *his* desert island, before the advent of his wonderful flying wife. But there is that "sweet little cherub" up aloft—the thought of him brings comfort and companionship. How very awful to be here quite alone, no Captain Dick upstairs. She can hear him moving about, and there is protection and cheeriness in every creak of his boots. She feels no inclination for sleep, she is abnormally wide-awake—that mighty sweep of sea and sky, that golden, crystal globe up there, all these yellow clusters

of stars, absorb her. It is such a night as she will never spend again, a night to be marked by a red stone in her life. She hopes Dot is not uneasy, but Dot will guess how it is. So she sits, and softly sings to herself, and the low, crooning lullaby steals up to the man overhead, and touches all that is chivalrous and tender in his heart.

"Dear little soul!" he thinks, "dear little, innocent, warm-hearted Vera! How much younger she is than most girls of her age—how true and clear she sings! What a noble, loving, generous woman she will make in five or six years. And how little is the fear of Mrs. Grundy before her eyes! What will Eleanor—what will Mrs. Charlton think and say of this escapade?"

Miss Charlton's refusal has not altogether, it will be perceived, broken the heart of Captain Ffrench. He feels considerably better, indeed, than before the ordeal—it is not certainty, but suspense that kills—Eleanor, conjugal bliss—Charlton *vs.* Englehart and the rest of these *bon camarades*—new discoveries, botanical and mineral, in Honduras—the die is cast between—it is to be the latter, and in his secret heart he rejoices.

Twelve by the clock of St. Ann's. Vera is still by the window, but her croon has ceased, she is growing sleepy, and a trifle chilly. After all, a person might as well have a sleep—moonlight and sea effects will keep. So, yawning very much, she takes her place on the lounge, and in five minutes is fast as a church.

Morning! She opens her eyes, as the first eastern beam shoots pink and golden into the little room. The window stands wide open and by it, smoking placidly, sits Captain Dick.

"Is it to-morrow?" she asks, rising on her elbow, "it does not seem half an hour since I lay down. Has Daddy come?"

"Good-morning, Doña Martinez. No, Daddy is still

among the missing. How late did you sit up last night? Far into my beauty sleep, I heard a still small voice chanting, 'We won't go home till morning.'"

"You heard nothing of the sort. How is the tide? on the ebb or flow? Can I walk ashore?"

"Here is some one!" cries Captain Ffrench. On the instant a boat sweeps round the curve of the island and runs sharply up on the sand.

"Daddy at last," says Vera, with a yawn. "I shall not have to walk after all."

"That is not Daddy's step," Daddy's master says, quickly. "There is more than one."

The footsteps draw nearer, the door opens, and four persons enter the room. Dora Lightwood, pale and breathless, Mrs. Charlton, austere and grim, Mr. Charlton, hobbling with a stick, a dark frown on his furrowed face, and the boatman last of all.

"Vera!" Dora cries, and rushes forward, and falls on her sister's neck, and lifts up her voice and weeps.

The rest stand still—a dread trio. Captain Dick rises and removes his pipe, a crushing sense of iniquity upon him as he meets Mrs. Charlton's gorgon gaze. Then there is silence. And until the last day of his life that scene is before Dick Ffrench—his little den all jubilant with the morning sunshine. Dora's suppressed sobbing, Mrs. Charlton's stony glare, and the dark frown in his step-father's face. It never fades. But most of all, he sees little Vera, instinctively withdrawing from her sister, and with a brave, bright, loyal smile, taking her stand by his side. The image of Vera as she stood there will be with him his whole life-long.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MORNING AT SHADDECK LIGHT.

VERA is the first to speak.

"It is not Captain Dick's fault," she exclaims, eagerly. "Dora—and all of you! it is not Captain Ffrench's fault. It is Daddy's. He never came from St. Ann's all last night, and so I had to stay."

A sort of smothered groan breaks from Mrs. Charlton. It says plainer than words, "Worse and worse! Not even Daddy to act as chaperon."

"And it stormed so, I was frightened nearly to death, and then when that was over the tide rose, and I couldn't walk —or swim. And there was no boat. And Captain Dick had his shoulder hurt, and couldn't manage one if there was. And I tell you Daddy never came. Dot, why don't you say something?" cries Vera, stamping her foot, all breathless and flushed in her defence. "What do you stand looking like that for? I didn't think you would be uneasy. I thought you were sure to know. What is the matter with you all? It was nobody's fault—nobody could help my staying here last night."

No one speaks. The silence is beyond all telling, tremendous. Richard Ffrench has ridden down on the bayonets of the enemy to red death many a time, has faced starvation more than once last year on the pale frozen deep, has stood face to face with mortal peril many a time and oft, but never —no never—has he felt such blank consternation as possesses him now! Conscience makes cowards of us all. He has been held a brave soldier, a reckless boatman, a fearless explorer, a daring hunter, but at this moment he is horribly

afraid of Mrs. Charlton. And Mrs. Charlton's "glittering eye" is upon him, and holds him as that other dread optic held the trembling wedding guest.

Vera comes a little nearer, draws quite away from Dora, and stands close by his side, her dark face flushing angrily.

"Captain Dick is not to blame," she repeats proudly; "he never sent for me, he never wanted me to come. But I am glad I came—yes glad!" says Vera, flinging back her head defiantly, "for if I had not he would have been alone here with his disabled arm. None of *you* cared! Not that he wanted anything, but if he had it would have been all the same. Daddy went to the druggist's, and never came back. And now, if you are ready," says Vera picking up her hat, and flashing defiance on the company, "*I* am. Good-by, Captain Dick."

"Not good-by just yet Vera, only good-morning," he answered, and with a smile takes the hand she offers in his strong clasp. His eyes praise and thank her, but his lips only smile. She knows nothing, except that they are all angry with her for staying from home last night, and want to throw the blame on him. She turns to the door, no one tries to stop her, on the contrary, Dora desires the greedily listening boatman to go as well.

"Take her to the boat," she says, "and wait till we come."

They depart and the house door closes behind them. Then Dora rises in her outraged sisterhood, and faces the enemy. To the frivolous mind it looks like a little barn-yard bantam ruffling its white feathers, and challenging to mortal combat a big Newfoundland. But there are no frivolous minds present, and Captain Dick feels his hour has come! She is pale, and her cold blue eyes have a strange dry glitter, that really looks as much like triumph as anger.

"And now, Captain Ffrench," she begins, "what have *you* to say?"

"Nothing whatever," retorts that culprit, promptly. "Vera has told you all about it, I am very sorry if her absence caused you anxiety last night; but I presume the storm extended as far as Charlton. As she says, it could not be helped."

"You have no more to say than this?"

"Not that I know of. I am very sorry. I am not aware that there is anything more to be said."

Miss Lightwood turns from him to the others, as if saying: "You hear! He adds to the atrocity of his conduct cold-blooded indifference. And I am a poor little unprotected creature, unable to help myself."

"You must be aware, sir," says Mr. Charlton, coming to the rescue, his voice harsh with irritating pain, "that this is an abominable affair—that people will talk—that—that it's an outrageous affair—that I wouldn't have had it happen for a thousand pounds—that—that there will be a devil of a scandal—that—that, in short, sir, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

He strikes his stick angrily on the ground, feeling that there is more stumbling in his eloquence than is needful, and thinking how little like the prisoner at the bar his boy looks, standing erect there, his head held well up, his dark face a little pale, his frank, honest, fearless eyes meeting theirs unflinchingly. For Dick, a very craven in his secret soul, before his accusing angels, has a dogged instinct that he means to die game, outwardly at least.

"Vera Martinez is blighted for life," says Mrs. Charlton, opening her sealed lips, and speaking in a deep, strong, slow, rasping, ominous monotone.

"Madam!" says Dick Ffrench, savagely, swinging round, his face flushing red.

"Blighted for life!" repeats Mrs. Charlton, waving him contemptuously down—"irretrievably blighted! She must live under a cloud all the rest of her days. It would have

been better for her if you had turned her out in the storm to perish, than have kept her here. Last night will be fatal forever to the reputation of this most unhappy young girl."

She waves her hand again; her tone is deep and Siddons-like; it freezes the very marrow of this hapless young man's bones. Her gesture is tragic—indeed, she looks uncommonly like the tragic muse altogether, grown elderly and stout. Her stony stare is a blood-freezing thing to meet. Her words go through him one by one like bullets. Dora stands pallid, mournful, despairing—life evidently holds nothing more for *her*.

Mr. Charlton is near her, gloomy, silent, frowning. He and Dot are the gentlemen of the jury, Mrs. Charlton is the judge. The black cap is ready; he has been tried by his peers and found guilty. If he has anything to say why the sentence of the law should not be pronounced, now is the time! It is the supreme hour of his life. And he stands, tall, square-shouldered, upright, looking from one to the other, the wretched prisoner in the dock, reading no hope of mercy in either Rhadamanthus face.

"Look here!" he bursts out at last, "this is all confounded rubbish, you know. Blighted! Under a cloud! Sent adrift to perish! By George! You use forcible English, Mrs. Charlton! I tell you, governor, I tell you, Miss Lightwood, I tell you, madam, I am not to blame. It was simply an impossible thing for Vera to go home last night. As to sending her out to perish, that is all bosh, of course."

"I have no more to say," says Mrs. Charlton, folding her hands, and turning austerely away. "It is no business of mine. *My* daughter knows nothing of it, and shall not. It is a very delicate and disagreeable subject. I wash my hands of the whole matter. If the young person herself is satisfied," with a short, file-like laugh, "*we* may be, I think."

"She is such a child—such a child," sobs Dora, covering

her face with her hands, "she does not know. Oh! why did we ever, ever come!"

Dick puts his hands to his head, feeling that his senses are reeling. What has he done—what is he to do? Is it really such a tremendous affair as they are trying to make out, or is all this a new version of Much Ado About Nothing? He is not versed in the nicer gradations, the subtler shades of feminine propriety, as rigidly required by Mrs. Grundy—he only knows that he wishes an earthquake would split Shaddeck Light in two and swallow him bodily. It would be less terrific than Dora's sobs, or Mrs. Charlton's death's-head stare.

"What do you want me to do?" he demands, turning at bay upon his tormentors at last.

"I?" She laughs another short, rasping laugh. "Nothing whatever. It is nothing to me. Vera Martinez's disgrace does not touch ——"

"Disgrace!" cries Richard Ffrench, with sudden fierceness, facing her.

"There is no other word for it that I know of—no other the world will call it by."

"The world be ——"

"No!" says Mrs. Charlton, lifting her arm "*that* I will not endure. Swearing or passion never mended a shattered reputation yet. I permit no man to blaspheme in my presence."

"You mean to say ——"

"I mean to say that I have no more to say. You are neither so ignorant, nor so innocent as you pretend. You are a man of the world, Captain Ffrench, and do not need me to tell you what construction the world—when it knows it—will put upon Miss Vera's—ahem—eccentricity of last night. It is a very painful and embarrassing subject—I really must decline to discuss it now or at any other time."

"But, by Heaven! it *shall* be discussed," exclaims Cap

tain Ffrench, fairly enraged. "You come here, and blacken that child's character, and then tell me you will not discuss the subject ——"

"*I* blacken her character! You forget yourself, Captain Ffrench! Mr. Charlton, I must insist upon going. I never permit myself to be insulted twice."

"I beg your pardon!" Dick says, hastily, and with a sudden total change of tone. "I have no right to lose my temper. If you and Miss Lightwood, governor, will leave us for a few minutes I would like to—to——" he is at a dead-lock, and the sentence is not finished.

Dora's tears upset him beyond everything, and if there is any grain of truth in all this rhodomontade he would like to get at it. Vera to suffer through him! Why he would not have a hair of the dear little thing's head hurt for a universe.

They obey—Dora indeed wipes her eyes, and departs with alacrity. He places a chair for his marble guest, and takes another.

"Sit down," he says, briefly; "let us get at the head and front of my offending, if we can. In all innocence—in all inability to help myself, it seems I have blundered. You tell me I did wrong in keeping the little one last night. To do otherwise was simply impossible, but we will let that go. Keep her I did. By so doing you say I have blighted her good name for life. Now there are but two sorts of evil I take it, the curable, and the incurable. To which does this belong?"

"To the curable, decidedly," replies Mrs. Charlton, promptly. She sees she is torturing her victim, and takes a malignant delight in his writhing. She feels as a cold-blooded naturalist may who has a rare and precious beetle impaled on a pin.

"That is well. Now what am I to do?"

"Does the 'what am I to do' not present itself unsuggested, Captain Ffrench? In my day when a young man

seriously compromised a young woman, there was but one honorable alternative—to marry her! '

She brings out the word with vicious relish. She has not the faintest, slightest, most shadowy thought that he will entertain the idea, or she would never utter it. Has he not been but just rejected by her daughter—does he not look upon Vera as a little girl, as in point of fact she is? "Pure cussedness" has more to do with the spiteful suggestion than any thought of the possibility of its being acted upon.

He sits quite still, looking at her—his hands deep in his pockets, after his usual abstracted fashion, profound gravity on his face.

"This is the one alternative?" he asks.

"The one alternative," she answers, "and in this case out of the question."

"Why out of the question?"

"Why!" in imitated surprise. "Why? Because she is too young; because she is a great grown up baby; because you don't care a pin about her; because you are going away; because—oh! this is nonsense and a waste of time, and I really must go!"

He makes no attempt to detain her. He rises, opens the door politely, and escorts her to the boat. In it is seated Vera, her little straw hat tilted over her nose, half asleep in the sun. On the rocks are seated Mr. Charlton and Dora, in deep conversation—Dora still looking stricken and mournful, but resigned. Vera starts up at sight of him. They are making a great fuss about nothing she thinks, and badgering Captain Dick for what is no fault of his, with his hurt shoulder and everything.

"Governor," he says very quietly, "you will be at home for the rest of the day, I suppose? Some time this afternoon I shall go ashore and have a talk with you. Ladies, good-morning."

He takes off his hat ceremoniously to dame and demoi

selle; to Vera he gives a parting smile. That and the fact that he is coming later on, sends her home happy. No one scolds her, no one asks her questions, the subject is tacitly dropped. The worst is over; Captain Dick has been honorably discharged on her evidence alone, and she lifts up her voice and sings, half in gladness, half in mischievous defiance of grim Mrs. Charlton:

"A fair good morn to thee love,
A fair good morn to thee,
And pleasant be thy path love,
Though it end not with me."

Her high, sweet singing comes back on the morning wind to Richard Ffrench where he stands, and a smile breaks up the dark gravity of his thoughtful face.

"No vows were ever plighted—
We'd no farewell to say;
Gay were we when we met first,
We parted just as gay.

"A fair good morn to thee love,
A fair good morn awhile;
I have no parting signs to give,
So take my parting smile!"

At all times it comes as naturally as unconsciously, almost as frequently to Vera to carol as to breathe. The last words float back to him, as the Nixie turns into her little cave and disappears.

"A grown up baby!" he repeats. "Yes, Mrs. Charlton, you are right, but baby or no baby my poor little Vera, it seems I am to ask you to be my wife."

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTAIN DICK'S WOOING.

FIFTEEN minutes later Daddy appears in a hang-dog and apologetic fashion, looking sober and sorry for it. He had been overtaken by the storm, it appeared, and lying down in a back kitchen he knew of, had fallen asleep. For Daddy to fall asleep was a much easier thing than to awake; the gray dawn was breaking when he opened his eyes again on this mortal life.

Captain Ffrench waves him away. He might have apostrophized him as erstwhile Sir Isaac Newton did his immortal dog, Diamond: "Oh, Daddy! Daddy! little thou knowest the mischief thou hast done!" But the case is beyond all apostrophizing.

"Go in and get your breakfast," he says, resignedly; "don't trouble yourself with excuses. You have made the most distinguished blunder of your life, if the knowledge will give an edge to your appetite."

He is leaning over the low wall that incloses the house, his arms folded, and is preparing to think it out. He had been annoyed last night for Vera's sake, had thought it an awkward *contretemps* for the child; but the light in which the situation has been presented to him this morning, staggers him. These women should know better than he, and if it is as they say, then reparation must be made, as a simple matter of course. But is it? It looks absurd to him—women have a fashion of magnifying molehills into mountains; but for all that they may be very right; no one knows less than he. It is certainly true that he was in fault; Vera would—and wished to—and could easily have walked

ashore half an hour after she came, and he prevented her. "You have blighted her whole life!" The words came back to him in every surge of the surf, in a dread monotone.

Can it be true? His science is at fault here; all his big books, mathematical, botanical, geological, cannot help him out of his fog. "Under a cloud her whole life-long!" Mrs. Charlton must have meant it; she has no motive for saying what is false. And Dora's sobs, and his step-father's frown—yes, it must be so. A horrible blunder has been made, and the penalty must be paid by both. He faces the situation as squarely as he faced the columns of the enemy in the rattling charges of his old trooper days. Vera shall never suffer through him; if giving her his name can shield her from the world's slanders, she shall have it. But, poor child! what a shame, what a desecration of holy childhood it seems. Her liking for him is so frank, so open, so innocent, so fearless—it is akin to sacrilege to turn it to something she must blush for, and shrink from, and fear to show.

For himself it does not so much matter, and yet he likes his liberty as well as most men, and matrimony, in the abstract, is a subject on which he has never bestowed much thought. He is not of a susceptible nature: even in his calf-love days he never had the epidemic very badly. Certainly he has asked Miss Charlton to marry him—he admires her, esteems her, for her beauty, her goodness, her worth. If she had consented, he would doubtless have settled down into a very admirable married man—as married men go, and made as humdrum a head of a family as the majority. He would, no doubt, have been happy, too, not rapturously, nor excitedly blissful, but with a cool, steady going, calm content, that would have spread out thin, and lasted better than the enthusiastic sort of thing. But Miss Charlton has said no, and he is bearing up under it, and despair has not marked him for her own. But whether or no, to have to marry little Vera! "By Jove!" says Captain Dick, blankly

aloud. The thing refuses to look reasonable, all his thinking faculties are at a dead lock. "Marry little Vera!" And then he laughs—something utterly absurd in the whole thing strikes his sense of the ludicrous. It is the most delicious joke—or would be, if he were only a second, not a principal. Marry little Vera! Marry the Doña Martinez! Marry that small girl—only sixteen, by George! and hardly twelve, so far as her ideas matrimonial are concerned! What will Englehart and the rest of them say?

But his sense of the humor of the thing is not hilarious. Poor little Vera! it is a shame! And in years from now—six—ten—how will she regard it? Will such a marriage not spoil her life far more than the lack of it? She is not competent to judge for herself; there are misses of sixteen, with all a woman's maturity of judgment on the two great subjects of female life—dress and husbands; but she is not one of them. There are girls and girls. Vera will say yes if he asks her, because she likes him in her girlish fashion, and because she does not understand enough to say no. His face grows grave—he resolves that he never *will* ask her. If her life is to be sacrificed, some one else shall prevail upon her to sacrifice it. Still his duty—if it be his duty—must be done.

He stands a long time there, grave, preoccupied, trying to see daylight, and failing lamentably. It is all a muddle—and much thinking only makes a bad matter worse. He gives it up at last, and goes indoors to his big, dusty, grim-looking volumes. *These* are friends, at least, that never bewilder—that are tried, and trusty, and true. But reading is not so easy as he thinks. Vera comes between him and every page; Vera with her wistful face, as he opened his eyes, and saw her first last evening, frightened, troubled for him; Vera all bright with defiance this morning, taking her stand by his side, and doing battle in his defence; Vera seated beside him, telling him her pathetic little story of

death, and loss, and weary work. And he has done her harm! He feels as a man may who has crippled for life through his blundering carelessness a little child.

Poor little Vera! dear little Vera! Either fate seems equally hard for her. But his mind is made up. If Vera is not old enough, or wise enough to decide for herself, her sister is both. Shrewd, unscrupulous, keen little woman of the world that she is. Dora shall be umpire. She loves the little one—surely she will know and decide for the best.

It is almost three o'clock in the afternoon when Captain Ffrench is shown into his step-father's private study. Mr. Charlton is ensconced in his arm-chair, lying back with closed eyes, and in a low rocker near Miss Lightwood sits reading aloud. And very charming indeed Miss Lightwood looks, in the green twilight of the shaded room, as fair, and fresh, and pink as a rose. Her dress is white Swiss, and crisp as a new bank-note, and her pretty arms and neck sparkle through its gauzy clearness—her fair hair is "done" in a gilded pyramid on the top of her head, and frizzed down to her eyebrows. She lays down her book and looks up with a smile, but the smile fades when she sees the visitor. She rises, gives him one reproachful glance, says something incoherently, and hurries out of the room. Evidently she has not got over it.

"I am very sorry to intrude upon you," Captain Ffrench says, standing erect, a certain stiffness, both in words and manner. "I certainly would not have done so, after our recent interview, but for this unfortunate affair of last night."

"You do well to call it an unfortunate affair. It is that, and more, and *she* is likely to find out to her cost, poor little fool!"

"Not if any action of mine can repair the folly. The fault of her staying was wholly mine—thoughtlessly, but absolutely mine. She wanted to go home; she could have gone home, but I liked to have her with me, and detained

her. I need hardly say I expected to send her home with Daddy after dark. I failed to do that, and the consequence I am told is, that her good name is, or may be injured. I don't know much about these delicate matters myself—I have no wish needlessly to sacrifice my own future or hers, to the prurient scruples of an old woman—I don't see my way clearly to what is my duty in this matter. When I do I am ready to do it."

"You were told tolerably plainly though, this morning."

"Do you mean to say you believe all that rot, about blighting her life, and so on? I ask you, governor, as man to man—in plain English, do you think I am bound to marry Vera?"

"In plain English, then—*yes*, if she will have you."

There is a pause. Mr. Charlton looks up under his bushy brows. In his heart he knows this advice is not disinterested—in his heart he knows if his boy were not on the verge of departure for years, he would never give it. Vera is well enough, but she is too young to be Dick's wife. He wishes to see him married and settled, but not to a half-educated slip of a girl. But he too has argued the matter out, and it stands thus: If Dick does not marry he will go—if he does marry he must—he ought, in common decency, to stay. Ergo, it is better he should marry. And then Dora has been talking to him, and making him see the case with her sharp little eyes. It is coming to this pass, that Dora can make him see all things pretty much as she wishes.

"Very well, sir," says Dick Ffrench, resignedly, "that is all. I abide by your decision. Now I will leave you. I trust your coming out this morning has not caused any relapse?"

Mr. Charlton replies curtly in the negative. He is dying to know what is in Dick's mind, what he intends to do, if he will really propose to Vera, and, pending her growing up, resign Honduras, but he is too proud to ask. Dick must

volunteer, he will never again broach the Honduras matter.

"Where am I most likely to find Miss Lightwood?" Ffrench asks.

"Miss Lightwood? Do you mean Vera?"

"I mean Miss Lightwood. I am going up to New York by the five o'clock train, and have a few words to say to her first."

"She is generally in the drawing-room when she is not here." Going to New York, Mr. Charlton thinks. Humph! that is odd too.

Dora is in the drawing-room, in the recess of a bay-window, embowered in flowers. At quite the other end of the room, Eleanor is at the piano, playing one of Schubert's tender, pathetic pieces. He greets her gravely and passes on, and stands before Dora. What he has to say he can say in a few words—to all intents and purposes they are alone.

"I am going to New York this afternoon," he begins, "and am not likely to be down again more than once before my departure, and then only for a few hours."

She glances up quickly; it is not the opening she has looked for, but something in his face and tone tells her there is more behind.

"I do not forget what you and Mrs. Charlton said to me this morning—that is not likely. It has made all the impression either of you could desire. I am here to make whatever atonement I can make—whatever it is my duty to make. You are Vera's sister, friend, monitor—older, wiser, better versed in the world than she. Her welfare must be near to your heart. Decide for her then. In this evil, that I have inadvertently brought upon her what is it that you wish me to do?"

Her cheeks flush hotly. He stands before her, erect, so masterful, so simple, so earnest, in his strong, young manhood, that he puts her to shame. After all, she is a woman,

he a man, and the blunt directness of the question makes her wince, and turn hot all over her body. "I want you to marry my sister," is almost as hard to say as "I want you to marry *me*."

"Will you not sit down?" she says, almost petulantly, and turning from him.

"Thank you—no. If I catch my train," looking at his watch, "I have but little time to spare. This is a matter I cannot possibly discuss with Vera; cannot broach to her at all. I want my answer then from you."

"Do you mean to say you will not speak to her at all of—of——"

"I mean to say I will not speak to her at all. Whatever is to be said to the poor child, you—her sister—shall say it. From first to last, the issue and its consequences shall rest with you."

She looks up at him, and almost hates him. All the same, all the more, he shall marry Vera.

"It is rather hard to throw the consequence of your imprudence and hers, on my shoulders. Still, as you say her welfare is very dear to me. We two stand quite alone in the world. I am bound not to see her wronged without lifting my voice. And—thoughtlessly I am sure—meaning no ill I know, you have done her grievous wrong, Captain Ffrench!"

"So it seems. Now, how am I to set that wrong right?"

"There is but one way," she says, and looks him boldly in the face, though her color deepens again.

"And that is——?"

"To shield her with your name—to make her your wife."

He bows his head. Eleanor sits with her back to him, playing very softly, so as not to disturb their conversation. A strange sort of angry, impatient pain fills him, set, it seems to him, in some intangible way to the mournful sweetness of the air.

"Does she know?" he asks at length.

"She knows nothing." Dora interrupts quickly, "nothing! Do you think I would tell her, Captain Ffrench? Vera is as innocent as an angel, as ignorant as a baby. No one has said one word to her."

"That is well. And now the matter simplifies itself. I am going as I say—I will be down only once more. You will ask your sister for me, if she will do me the honor to become my wife. Her answer, you, or she, or both can write. Here is my address. If that answer is yes——."

"It will be yes," says Dora, very low.

"You will arrange the marriage for the twenty-third. On the twenty-fourth I will sail with the expedition. My friend, Dr. Englehart, will come down with me; and I—if it is all the same to you and her—I should wish the matter kept as private as may be. I can depend upon Englehart, and I think it is best the others should not know. It is a subject you see on which I should not relish chaff."

She looks up at him. "You will really go then?" is on the tip of her tongue, but she bites it and bows silently.

"It shall be as you say. If Vera is to be wooed and won by proxy, I might as well be the ambassadress, I suppose. Please give me your New York address."

He gives it. And now a sense of the grim humor of the thing begins to dawn on Dora. She is a designing little witch, but she has this redeeming point, she knows a joke when she sees it and can laugh. A faint smile ripples about her lips now, as with the greatest gravity he pencils his hotel, and hands it to her.

"You will say to Vera—for me—what you think best. On the twenty-third I will be here. You will make her understand that I do not give up the expedition, and that I may be absent for years. Mr. Charlton will of course give her a home here, until my return—that I must exact if I marry. You will mention it to him."

"Anything else, Captain Ffrench?"

"That is all, I think. I will not see Vera just now—it is better I should not. Make my adieux to her. Good-day, Miss Lightwood."

He bows and departs. Dora looks after him a moment, her bright eyes dancing with laughter.

"Was there ever such a great, simple-headed, ridiculous Dick," she thinks. "*I* am to do his courting, am I? What an artless pair he and Vera will make—about five years old, each of them!"

She laughs softly, as she watches him say good-by to Eleanor.

"And what will Nelly say—asking her one day, and marrying Vera the next? And her mother! Ah! Mrs. Charlton, you builded better than you knew, when you took Captain Dick to task—not for Vera's sake, but to gratify your own inborn ill-nature. And Charlton is to be the child's home after all!"

She sees the young man leave the house, and go down the avenue with his long trooper's stride. Vera is nowhere about, and he is glad of it. He feels he cannot meet her just now. When he has quite gone, Dora rises briskly, and goes up to her sister's room. Vera lies, indulging in an afternoon siesta, induced by her sentimental vigil of last night, all unconscious that the hour is past, and her hero come and gone.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW DORA DOES IT.

DORA stands a moment and looks at her sister, a half smile on her face. Vera has coiled herself up like a kitten, in her white cover—sleep and warmth have flushed her cheeks—all her black, short tresses curl up damp and silky around her forehead. She looks like the child she is, although tall and well-grown for her sixteen years, and she comes nearer being pretty, just now, than Dora has ever seen her.

"Can it be possible she is going to grow into a handsome woman?" Miss Lightwood thinks; "her father was, I think, the handsomest man I ever saw, and Vera resembles him. If she does, Richard Ffrench will not have done so very badly after all. He is fond of her, too, but not in that way—yet. Men of his stamp never fall in love with girls in the transition stage—in the short frock—and bread-and-butter epoch—they require full-grown women. Well! Vera will be that before he returns from his silver mining, and then he can woo his wife at his leisure."

She takes a seat by the window, through which a cool breeze is blowing up from Shaddeck Bay. She does not awaken her sister; there is no hurry. It has been said already that this girl is the one creature on earth Dora Lightwood loves. To her mind this thing she is about to do is a proof of that love. Vera is fond, *very* fond of Richard Ffrench; she admires him beyond everything—he is her Sir William Wallace, her Sir Folko Montfauçon, her Sir Launcelot all in one, and a little superior to any of them.

What can conduce more to her future happiness than to be made his wife? Vera has never thought of this, never once, and Dora knows it—her fondness and admiration are in the abstract. She would be perfectly satisfied to see him married to Eleanor or herself—all the same she would like to remain near him, to be with him always. The girlish fancy which makes him her ideal hero of romance now, will make him the man she loves by and by. Vera is of the type whose destinies are ruled much more by their heart than head—her love will make or mar her life. Then—taking a more practical turn—Captain Ffrench is likely, eventually, to be not only a very rich, but also a very distinguished man. He has talent of no common order, he has unflinching determination, a dogged resoluteness to succeed. He is not afraid of hard work or waiting. Men of that kind are bound, sooner or later, to go up to the head of the class. Married to him, Vera's toiling days will be over; Charlton, which she loves so much, will be her home; she will have nothing to do, but grow up gracefully, study the accomplishments, transform herself into a pretty woman, and win her husband's heart on his return. On the whole, it is just as well he is going. Vera *is* too young; she needs at least four years of hard study, then a winter in "the world;" at the end of that time she will be fit to be any man's wife. For herself—— but here Dora breaks off, and her musing, half smile deepens. She has her own dreams, and into them the show-rooms on Fourteenth Street enter not. She may sweep through madame's handsome suite occasionally, but it will not be as forewoman. The waving trees of Charlton Place cast inviting shadows as she sits and looks. These are pleasant pastures—why go out from them to crop the scanty herbage that grows about the streets of New York?

All in a moment Vera awakes, looks blinkingly about her, rubs her knuckles into her eyes, and sits up with a gape.

"You, Dot? Is it morning?"

"It is five in the afternoon," answers Miss Lightwood, "I hope you have had a long enough nap."

Five in the afternoon! Memory comes back to Vera with a bounce. She jumps out of bed, and stands the picture of consternation.

"Five! and Captain Dick said he would be here at three. Has he not come, then?"

"Captain Dick is the soul of punctuality, my dear, and every other virtue. He has been and gone."

"Gone!"

"Gone—gone to New York. He bade me say good-by for him to you. He has been gone precisely half an hour."

Vera sits down on the side of the bed, dismay in every feature. Tears fill her eyes, tears of anger, and reproach, and keenest disappointment. Her lips quiver.

"Gone! and you never called me. Oh, Dot!"

"Did you want to see him so badly, then? Why, child, it is not possible you are crying? Oh, this will never do! you are as ignorant as a Hottentot of all sense of feminine decorum."

"I don't care for decorum," says Vera, swallowing a gulp, "and I do——"

"For Dick Ffrench. *That* is patent to the universe. My dear, do you know what your Captain Dick would have a right to think if he saw you now!"

"That I was awfully sorry he went away without saying good-by."

"Worse than that—that you were awfully in love with him."

If Dora expects to galvanize Vera into a sense of her in decorum by this abrupt announcement, she is mistaken. Vera only chews the end of her handkerchief, and looks a trifle sulky.

"I don't care! He wouldn't think anything of the kind. As if a person couldn't like a person without being in love

with him. I think it was hateful of you, Dot, not to call me, when you knew I wanted to see him *so* much."

"You always do want to see him *so* much, don't you? And it is such a tremendous time since you saw him last! I should think," says Dora, a smile dawning about her pretty mouth, "you and he could have talked yourselves completely out of every earthly subject last night."

"We didn't sit up talking all night, and you know it. And now he has gone to New York, and perhaps will not come down again at all."

The tears are welling very near the surface again, and tremble in the voice that speaks.

"Oh, yes, he will—he said so; he told me to tell you so. He is coming down for a particular purpose, indeed. Vera, come here—sit down. I have a message for you from Captain Ffrench."

Vera looks eagerly.

"Yes, Dot? But you might have called me, I think What is it?"

"You are *very* fond of Captain Dick, are you not?"

"Of course!" says Vera, promptly, and a little indignantly, at being questioned on such a self-evident fact. "I don't see how any one could help it."

Again Dora smiles, laughs outright indeed. It is impossible to help it—the child is so overpoweringly verdant.

"Well—but it won't do to say so to everybody you know. You are sixteen, Vera, and tall enough to be twenty. You are a young lady—not a child."

"Am I?" doubtfully. "I wish you wouldn't keep my dresses up to my ankles then, and I *should* love to have a crinoline. But the message! the message! Captain Dick didn't tell you to tell me I was grown up?"

"Something like it. Vera, your simplicity, your greenness exceeds all belief. Look here! do you happen to know what being married means?"

"Certainly I do!" retorts Vera, indignantly; "it means everything dowdy and stupid that ever was! It means scolding the help, and slapping the children, and having a horrid time getting money from your husband——"

"Yes, I see you know," says Dora, laughing. "You are thinking of Mrs. Trafton. But everybody does not of necessity marry a rich old miser. "Some girls," says Dora, smiling into her sister's large, unconscious eyes, "marry tall, good-looking young gentlemen—ex-captains of cavalry, let us say—of whom they are very, very, very fond, and they live in places they think beautiful beyond telling, and are happy as the day is long. Vera! Vera! what a goose you are! don't you understand? Would you not like to be married? Would you not like to be married to Richard Ffrench?"

Vera sits quite still, her eyes so unwinkingly fixed upon her sister, that she makes that eminently self-possessed young woman wince. Her color rises slowly, and deepens and deepens, but she looks neither startled nor shy.

"I don't know what you mean," she says.

"Oh, yes you do! You are fond of Captain Dick. When a young lady is fond of a young gentleman she naturally wishes to marry him."

"Does she?" says Vera, dubiously. "I suppose so. It always ends that way in stories. But I am not fond of Captain Ffrench like—like *that*."

"No? In what way then?"

"I never thought about marrying," says Vera, the red rising to the roots of her hair, "and you know it."

"But *he* has," says Dora, with emphasis: "he is not quite such a babe in the wood as you, my dear Vera. He has thought about marrying, not only thought about it, but spoken about it."

"About—marrying—*me?*"

"About—marrying—*you!*"

"But that is all nonsense!" cries Vera, amazed and in

dignant. "He must have been in fun, you know. Why, it is absurd! Only a week or so ago he asked Eleanor. I wish you wouldn't say such ridiculous things, Dot."

"Now, Vera, listen here. It isn't ridiculous. Captain Ffrench certainly asked Eleanor to marry him, but it was to please his step-father, not himself; he likes you best. Do you think he took Miss Charlton's refusal very much to heart? Why, any one could see he was glad of it. He likes you best, and he wants you to marry him, Vera."

"Wants me to marry—him!"

The words drop from her slowly, in vast amaze. She is trying to take in the idea. It is so entirely new that it refuses to be taken in all in a moment. But a great, slow light of gladness is coming into her eyes, too.

"Wants you to marry him," repeats Dora, watching her closely.

The dark eyes flash out a quick, sudden joy.

"Dot, would he stay at home? Would he stay here always? Would he not go to Honduras?"

"Oh, well, I am not so sure about that. He has promised, you know, and men like to keep their word. But he would come back all the sooner, and when he came back you need never be separated from him more."

Never be separated from him more!—never be separated from Captain Dick! There is rapture in the thought. It dawns upon her slowly. Always with him, rowing, driving, singing—seeing him, hearing him, becoming acquainted with his numberless perfections day after day. Why the very thought is elysian.

"Dora," she says, in solemn ecstasy, "I should *love* to marry Captain Dick!"

The look that accompanies this is too much for Dora. She leans back in her chair and laughs until the tears stand in her eyes.

"Oh, Vera, child, you will be the death of me yet! Oh,

you simpleton! You must never say such a thing as that!"

"Why not, if it is true?"

"Because—because the truth, the whole truth, is not to be told at all times. It is too rare and precious to be used in common in that way. Why, it would turn this crazy old world topsy-turvy in no time. You must never, *never* say you would love to marry any man. It is simply awful!"

"Not even Captain Dick?"

"Not even Captain Dick—least of all Captain Dick. You must never let a man know you are so fond of him as all that. It would be ruinous."

"Would it?" says Vera, looking dreadfully puzzled. "I am afraid I don't understand."

"I am afraid you don't. But you understand this—that Captain Dick wants to marry you?"

"What does he want to marry me for?"

There is something so irresistible in Vera's gravity as she asks these killing questions, that Dora nearly goes off again. But she restrains herself.

"Because he is very fond of you, of course. The fondness is mutual, you see. Why does any gentleman ask a lady to marry him?"

"To please his step-father sometimes, it seems. But that cannot be the reason now. Mr. Charlton does not want him to marry me. Dora, I believe this is all some joke you have made up to tease me."

"On my honor! The last thing Captain Dick said to me, not an hour ago, was to ask you to be his wife before he started for Central America."

"Then *he* was playing a practical joke, and I must say——"

"Vera, don't be an idiot! I tell you no! He likes you, and wants to marry you, and Mr. Charlton is very much pleased. Why don't you believe me?"

"Because the idea of anyone wanting to marry me—ME! —— Oh, it is ridiculous! And if he does, why didn't you wake me up, and let him ask me himself?" says Vera, still incredulous and suspicious.

"Why? Oh! well, you see he was rejected by one lady such a very short time ago, that really the poor fellow has not the hardihood to risk a second refusal. He spoke to Mr. Charlton about it first this afternoon, and then to me. You were so young, he said, and he feared to startle you, and all that, and would I just ask you for him. So I said yes, and that is why he did not wait to see you. He was in a hurry, too, to catch the five o'clock express. Here is his New York address, and you are to write to him and tell him your decision."

Slowly conviction is breaking upon Vera. But it is the strangest thing—the hardest to comprehend. Captain Ffrench want to marry *her!* She knows he likes her, but—she is fairly puzzled, troubled, afraid to believe, yet longing to do so. To be always with Captain Dick—always with him at Charlton. What a heavenly idea!

"If you don't believe me, come to Mr. Charlton," says Dora, calmly; "he is not in the habit of playing practical jokes."

But Vera rejects this idea with consternation. Not for all the world. Is Dora sure he is really pleased?

"Charmed," Dora asseverates.

"And Eleanor, and Mrs. Charlton——"

"They do not know—shall not know for the present. The wedding is to be strictly private. That is Captain Dick's wish."

The wedding! Vera gives a gasp.

"Then—when——"

"In about a fortnight," responds Dora with composure; "It is sudden, but it is also his wish. He leaves on the twenty-fourth, he wishes the wedding to be on the twenty-third. Those are his words."

Vera sits silent. Her unusual color is gone, and the dusk face and great dark eyes look wistful.

"It is so strange—so strange," she sighs. "I don't know what to say——"

"You don't know what to say!" exclaims Dora, aghast with surprise, "why you inexplicable child, I thought you would be delighted."

"Yes, yes, so I am. I like——oh! I *do* like Captain Dick! It is not that. There is nothing in the world I would not do for him. But it is so new, so strange—it frightens me somehow. To ask me so suddenly, to want to marry me, and then to go away just the same. When people marry people they stay at home with them, don't they?" inquires Vera, vaguely.

"Mostly," answers Dora, unable to repress a smile, "but this is an exceptional case. Captain Dick would naturally prefer to remain at home, but having promised he is bound to perform. You would not have him break his word, would you?"

"I would not have him do anything but what is noble and right," says Vera proudly, "he could not. If he wants me to marry him, I will mary him. If he wants me to go with him, I will go. If he wants me to stay here and wait for him, I will stay. I will do anything—everything—he wishes."

"A most delightful state of wifely subjection and duty. Well, my dear, it was a hard task, but I have beaten it into your stupid little noddle at last. Captain Ffrench wants to marry you on the twenty-third of August, and the marriage is to be as much on the quiet as possible, because immediately after he is obliged to leave you. I was to tell you this, and you are to send him your answer under your own hand and seal. That is the case. And now, I will leave you to digest it at your leisure, for you still look half dazed."

"And the letter?"

"The letter will keep. To-morrow will do.' And then she goes, and Vera is alone. Alone, with a whole new world breaking upon her, a world of new thoughts, hopes, plans, possibilities, bliss. Captain Dick wants to marry her —wants to marry *her*—this king of men—she, little Vera Martinez, with the thin face, and long arms, and cropped hair, and brown skin! Why, it is wonderful! The prince married Cinderella, to be sure, but then the fairy godmother had been to the fore first, and transformed the grimy little cinder-sifter into a lovely lady. Ah! why were the days of fairy godmothers extinct? Why can she not flash upon the dazzled vision of her hero, on the 23d inst. with a complexion of milk and roses, floating tresses of golden sheen (the lady on the bottles of Mrs. Allan's Hair Restorer, is before Vera's mind's eye, as she thinks this), not a single projecting bone or knuckle visible. And he will come back for her in a little while—has not Dot said so—and the fairy tale will end as a fairy tale ought, after all. "And they lived happy forever after."

CHAPTER XVII.

A GIRL'S LETTER.

MR. CHARLTON comes down to dinner to-day for the first time since his illness, and looks keenly across the table at his step-daughter-in-law elect. A glow of gladness is on the child's face, shining out as a light through a transparency. Her great new happiness is there for all the world to read. She blushes as she catches the old gentleman's eye—then laughs frankly, and Mr. Charlton smiles in sympathy with that gay little peal.

"She is too young—too young, but it will be all right by

and by. If the lad will but stay," he thinks, and looks with a sigh at the empty place.

After dinner, in the drawing-room, he goes up to Vera and takes her hand.

"And this is my little daughter?" he says.

She looks at him, and some womanly instinct awakes, and fills her eyes with tears. She stoops and kisses the wrinkled hand.

"If you will let me be, sir."

"And Dick's answer is yes?"

"It is yes, a thousand times over."

"Good! I like that. Have you told him so yet?"

"You know I did not see him, sir. I am to write to-morrow, Dora says."

"Ah! Dora says," he smiles, "it will soon cease to be as Dora says. You are very fond of Dick, are you not, little Vera?"

"Very fond, sir," Vera says, fearlessly and frankly, and without a blush.

"Well, my dear, God bless you. You must grow up a good, and clever, and accomplished woman, so he may be proud of you. For you are very young, my little girlie, to be married."

"I know it, sir. Very young, very ignorant, very unworthy to be Captain Dick's wife."

"I don't say that. And time works wonders. A girl with a head shaped like this, ought to have a brain. Beauty is very well—indispensable almost; but brains are well, too—the combination is excellent in a woman. I am sure you will have the beauty, I think you will have the brains. And listen to me, little Vera—keep Dick at home when you get him."

"I mean to try, sir," Vera answers, half laughing, half crying, "but, oh! it seems so presumptuous to think of his ever giving up anything to stay with me."

"I don't know about that. Don't be too modest. A man should stay with his wife. You must make yourself so fascinating, so accomplished, so charming, that he will be unable to leave you. You must study hard and grow up such a lady as we will all be proud of."

"I will try—oh, indeed I will try!" Vera exclaims, clasping her hands.

Ambition is stirring within her. Mr. Charlton's praises have elated her. Study, become accomplished, learned, clever—ah! will she not?

That evening passes like a dream—in Vera's after life its memory is misty as a dream. The restlessness that usually keeps her flitting about the room is gone; she sits quite still, her hands clasped behind her head, a dreamy smile on her face, her little high-heeled shoes crossed one over the other on a hassock. Dora is playing chess with Mr. Charlton, as customary; Mrs. Charlton sits making tatting; Eleanor is reading. Vera lifts her happy eyes and looks at her. Poor Nelly! she thinks, a great compassion filling her, how much she has lost. Does she realize it? Surely not, or she never could sit there with that quiet face, reading so steadily. To refuse—deliberately and in cold blood to refuse Captain Dick! As long as she lives, Vera feels, she will never be able to understand that ununderstandable wonder.

The steadiness of her gaze magnetizes Miss Charlton. She looks up from her book, smiles, and comes towards her.

"How quietly you sit; how happy you look," she says. "You are not like yourself to-night. What is it, my Vera?"

"I *am* happy," Vera answers, "happy, happy, happy! So happy that I do not think anything can ever give me a moment's trouble again. I am the very happiest girl in all the world."

"Indeed?" Eleanor laughs. "Permit me to congratulate you. Is it indiscreet to ask the cause?"

"Ah! I cannot tell you; it is a secret—yet—but you will know soon."

"It must be very soon, then, for I am going away on Monday."

Vera opens her eyes.

"On Monday? Going away from Charlton for good?"

"For good. I hope you are just a little sorry."

"Oh, Nelly, sorry! indeed, indeed, yes! But so soon. Next Monday? Oh, you must not! Mr. Charlton will never consent."

Eleanor smiles a little sadly.

"That is your mistake, my dear; Mr. Charlton has consented."

"But this is dreadfully sudden. Why, we were all to stay until September. What are you going so long before the time for? Are you tired of Charlton?"

"Tired!" Eleanor answers, and looks out at the moonlight, lying in broad, pale sheets in the grass. "No, little Vera, it is not that. I am going because I must go. So I am not to know this wonderful secret it seems. And Captain Dick gone, too!" smiling down into the eyes that droop suddenly, "and you and he such devoted friends! Did you see him this afternoon?"

"No, I did not see him," Vera answers, confusedly. What would Eleanor say if she knew? How can she sit and speak of him in that composed way when she has wilfully lost him forever? Does she guess it was only to please his step-father he asked her, and was she too proud to accept a reluctant lover? Will she not be pained, mortified, humiliated, when she knows the truth? Perhaps it is just as well for Eleanor's own sake she is going on Monday. It would be dreadful for her to be here, and see him married to somebody else. For she *must* regret him. It is out of the order of things for her to help it, and this seeming serenity is but the fair outside that covers a blighted heart. Something

like this goes through Vera's sentimental little head in the pause that ensues. Yes, on the whole, although she will miss and regret Nelly, it is as well.

"I see I am to pine in ignorance," says Miss Charlton. "Well, I shall take away a picture of a radiant face at least, and two blissful black eyes. How beautiful Charlton looks to-night. I wonder if I shall ever see it again?"

"Indeed you *shall!*" cries Vera, with emphasis; "often and often! I mean," as Eleanor looks at her in surprise, "that Mr. Charlton will invite you again next summer, and ——"

"Mr. Charlton will not invite me next summer, my dear, and I have a tolerably strong conviction that I am looking my last on its green beauty. Well! it is the inevitable, and at least I am the better for having been here. Come and sing for me; I like that fresh skylark voice of yours. I will play. Do you know, Vera, you have a very fine voice—so fine, that, properly cultivated, you might leave off teaching, and distinguish yourself on the lyric stage."

"I don't want to distinguish myself—in that way," Vera answers, thinking how differently the bolls of life are breaking for her; "but, all the same, it shall be cultivated, and I am glad, very glad, it is fine."

Again Eleanor looks at her in surprise. She does not understand the girl this evening. What is this new happiness that has come to her? Has Mr. Charlton offered to adopt, educate, and keep her with him here always? And is Dora to stay, too, as prime minister of the household? It looks like it, and seems reasonable. He likes brightness, and gayety, and youth, and pretty looks, and he is wealthy enough to indulge in more unreasonable whims. Of the dark doings of last night she knows nothing. Her mother is still in a state of the blackest, silentest sulks; no one else is likely to inform her. So she settles it in her own mind that this is the solution, as she strikes the first chord of her accompaniment.

For a long time that night Vera lies awake, thinking of her new felicity and of her letter. What is she to say to Captain Dick? She knows nothing of the forms that obtain in love-letters, and her reading, copious, light, and romantic as it has been, gives her very little data to go upon. Sir Folko is a married man when the admiring reader is first introduced to him, consequently has no need to indite tender epistles. Ivanhoe never corresponded with either Rebecca or Rowena, so far as Vera can remember—very probably did not know how to write indeed; and the Corsair, in all his piratical meanderings, never so much as sent a single postal-card to the drooping Medora! As it chances, Vera has written but two letters in her life, and these of the briefest, to the Miss Scudder of her story. She has a melancholy consciousness that she does not shine on paper, that neither her orthography, chirography, nor syntax, is above reproach. But then there is Dora—there is always Dora—Dora will know what to say, and how to spell the words of three syllables, if she has to tackle any of these staggerers; and with this blissful sense of refuge she drops at last to sleep.

But, to her surprise and indignation, Dora flatly refuses next day.

"Write your own love-letters, my dear," she says, coolly; "it is a good rule never to interfere between man and wife—even if they are only man and wife elect. One never gets thanks in the end. Here is a nice sheet of thick white paper, a pen I can recommend, and a bottle of ink as black as your eyes. And here is a dictionary—I know *that* is indispensable, you poor little ignoramus. Now begin. Only I shall expect to see this famous production when done. In the annals of sentimental literature I am quite sure it will stand alone."

Dora is obdurate, deaf to all pleading, to the great disgust of the letter-writer. Thrown thus upon her own resources

Vera, after sitting for a while disconsolate, plucks up heart of grace, dips her pen in the ink, and begins :

"CHARLTON PLACE, Aug 11, 18——

"DEAR CAPTAIN DICK :"

That much glides off smoothly enough. After all people make a great deal more fuss about letter-writing than it is worth. Vera feels she would not accept help now if it was offered—she will do it alone or perish—with an occasional peep into the big dictionary. So knitting her brows into a reflective scowl, she goes on, murmuring her sentences half aloud as she writes :

"DEAR CAPTAIN DICK: Dora has asked me to marry you. I like you very much, I think it would be splendid to be your wife. I am very much obliged to you for wanting me ——"

"It sounds jerky, somehow," says Vera, pausing discontentedly, "and it has too many I's. I never let Lex put three of his I's so close together as that. Dot! you are laughing!"

Dora is holding a book up before her face, and is shaking behind it. At this accusing cry she looks over the top to protest she never was more serious in her life, but in the effort explodes into a perfect shout. Vera lays down her pen in deepest dudgeon.

"If you can do better, why don't you come and do it? When a person refuses to help another person, and then can find nothing better to do than sit and laugh——"

"It—it is lovely!" gasps Dora, with tears in her eyes. "Did I not say it would be unique? To interfere with that letter would be to paint the lily. Oh! go on—go on! 'I am much obliged to you for asking me!' Oh, my side! I shall die if I laugh any more."

"Isn't that right?" inquires Vera, suspiciously. "I *am* much obliged to him, and why shouldn't I say so?"

"Why, indeed? Oh, proceed—I promise not to interrupt more."

Vera compresses her lips. She feels that this is hard to bear, and would scratch out the much obliged, if she knew what to put in its place. But she does not.

"You might have knocked me down with a *feather* when Dot told me. The idea of being married to *you*, or anybody. Why, I never thought of such a thing. And you must see so many ladies *older* and *taller*, and ever so much *prettier* than *me!* I cannot for the life of me see what you want *me* for. But I would rather marry *you* than anybody in the world. And I think Ffrench a *beautiful* name. Véronica Mary Martinez Ffrench! Does it not sound kind of rich and imposing? But *Mrs.* Captain Richard Ffrench—*that* is better still. And always to live here (Dot says I shall), why it will be just like *heaven*. At least, I suppose, that is irreverent, but it will be a sort of paradise on earth—only I wish you were not going away—it seems such a *shame* just to get married, and then start off on a *tour* with Dr. Englehart, and leave *me* behind. Couldn't *I* go to Honduras, too? But there! I *know* I would be in the way, and I want to stay at home besides, and study *ever* so hard, so that you may not be *ashamed* of me when I grow up? The idea of a gentleman's *wife* growing up. Is it not funny?"

Vera stops, making insane plunges at the inkstand, her eyes on the sheet, all in a glow of inky inspiration. Dora, indeed! She would like to catch herself asking Dora to help her with her letters after this. Why, it is as easy as talking.

"You must tell me when you come down about the things you would like me to *study hardest* when you are away. I hope you will not be *very* particular about botany and algebra—I *hate* arithmetic, and I *know* I never *can* master nine times. Oh! I nearly forgot! I was *dreadfully* sorry you went away without speaking to me, but I was *asleep* upstairs, and Dot never woke me. And now I shall only see you *once* before you go, and then we will be in such a fuss *getting married* that we won't have time to say a single thing. What a *lovely* chat we had at Shaddeck Light night before last, hadn't we? I shall always *love* that little house, and I mean to take my books there when you are gone,

and look after *Daddy* and the rest of the things till you come back. I *do* hope you will come back *soon*. It will be *awfully* lonesome when you are gone."

Here Vera falls back in her chair, exhausted, but triumphant. She has filled three sides of her sheet already, and in her very finest hand. She is doubtful whether epistolary etiquette does not demand that the fourth page be left blank, but she will die rather than ask Dot.

"Done, dear?" says Dora, coming over. "Let me read it."

Vera yields it up reluctantly. She feels it is more than Dora deserves, but there may be some bad spelling—she has not consulted Webster—and it is best it should be as nearly perfect as possible. She watches her sister jealously as she reads, prepared to resent any symptom of unseemly levity. But Dora holds her risible faculties well in hand, and gets through without disgracing herself.

"It is exquisite, my child; it is all my fancy painted it. Now I think I would wind up, if I were you; let him have just enough to make him wish there was more."

"I think I have got in pretty much everything," says Vera, musingly. "I must tell him to excuse mistakes, and to write soon, and I am his affectionately. How do you spell aff-ec-tion-ate-ly, Dot? I am sure of it all but the 'shin.'"

This knotty point is got over, the letter is finished, folded, enveloped. Vera licks the gum with relish, and sticks it with pride. Then she writes the address in her largest, noblest hand,

"CAPTAIN R. C. FFRENCH."

Was there ever such an idyllic name? And the letter is an accomplished fact. Her first real letter! her first love-letter! She holds it from her, and gazes on it in that glow of pride and enthusiastic rapture with which a youthful artist gazes on his first painting—now in this light, now in that.

"I shall post this myself," says Vera, with calm determination. "No mortal hand shall be intrusted with it. I only hope it may go safe. It would be a dreadful thing if it went astray. Are letters *very* often lost, Dot, on the way?"

"Between St. Ann's and New York? No, my dear, they are not. And even if they were, this would be sure to go—could not fail to go. It is like a sign-board. I could read that 'Ffrench' if I were at the other end of the garden."

"A large, bold hand shows decision of character," responds Vera, firmly; "and decision of character I mean to have. I have a cramp in my fingers from making those letters so large and inky. You might drive me over this afternoon, Dot; it is too hot and dusty for walking."

Dora agrees, and Vera, feeling the need of relaxation after this severe mental strain, whistles to Nero, the house dog, and challenging that black monster to a race, they are soon tearing up and down the avenues. It is hot, she says, but one *must* have physical exercise after a prolonged course of writing, else the application might be injurious to one's health. She has read that somewhere, and means to store up all these scraps of useful information, neatly labelled, to be kept until called for. A very paragon of learning and wisdom, she is resolved, shall be the future Mrs. R. C. Ffrench.

Four hours later the letter, big with fate, is posted, and on its way to New York, and the destiny of two people is settled for all time.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DAYS BEFORE.

AND now the days fly. If each one were forty-eight hours long it would hardly be long enough, Dora Lightwood thinks. For Vera they fly, too, but then that is a way Vera's days have always had, only now they seem doubly winged, and each brings the eventful twenty-third and Captain Dick nearer. One, two, three, four—here is Monday and Eleanor is going. Really going, and Eleanor's mamma, seized at the last moment with a second attack of neuralgia, is unable to accompany her—unable to lift her tortured head from her pillow. Eleanor must go alone.

"Neuralgia!" laughs Miss Lightwood, scornfully. "Left her window open all night, and the sudden change to cold, etc. Bah! What an old liar she is!" Miss Lightwood always makes a point of calling a spade a spade. "She is very well off here, and here she means to stay. Well! we shall see."

So Eleanor goes alone, and is kissed good-by in her sweetest way by Dora, and is driven to the station by that most dashing of little whips. Vera goes too, and clings to her at the last, tears in the brown eyes, wistful, imploring, pleading, in the young face.

"Nelly! Nelly! how sorry I am you are going. Oh! Nelly, I thought and said horrid things of you once. I am sorry now; sorry, sorry! Forgive me, won't you, before you go?"

"Thought and said horrid things of me? Why, my pet," says Miss Charlton, laughing, "what had I done?"

"Oh! I am a wretch! A little bad-tempered wretch! You refused Captain Dick"—in a whisper this, and the hot face hidden—"and I couldn't bear it. And I hated you-there!"

"My dear child! how can you possibly know——"

"I was in the room—you didn't see me, but I was, and I overheard. Wasn't it awful? But I didn't mean to. I told him about it, and he said the loveliest things of you! You are not angry, are you?"

"Angry, dear? Why, no. Only you must never tell that you—that I——"

"I know—I know. Of course not. And, Nelly,"—she has taken hold of a button of Miss Charlton's jacket and is twisting it round and round—"you are sure—you are not sorry now—sorry you said no, I mean?"

"It had to be no, Vera. It could never possibly have been anything else."

"And you would not take him now, even if he came and offered again?"

"No."

"You are sure?"

"I am certain." She smiles, but blushes a little, too. "Why, what a little inquisitor it is! How fond you are of Captain Dick."

Ah! fond. But there is something besides that fondness in Vera's face, as she stands nervously twisting the button.

"What is it, pet?" Eleanor asks. "By the way, I want you to say good-by for me to Captain Dick when he comes. We are never likely to meet again."

"Oh! Eleanor—are you not sorry?"

"Yes—no—yes, I suppose so. He is a gallant gentleman, and I like him. Vera, you are trying to say something. Why, how you are blushing, child!—and here is my button half off." She holds the little destructive hand. "Out with it, quick! there is the last bell."

Vera flings her arms around her neck, regardless of the loungers on the platform, and whispers, with a vehement kiss :

"In nine days *I* am to be married to Captain Ffrench!"

The last bell is clanging—Miss Charlton has barely time to rush on board. There is not another word exchanged, she waves her hand from the window, perfectly speechless with surprise, and then the train steams out, and she is gone. The first gap is made in the Charlton summer circle.

They drive slowly through the town, taking the post-office on their way. What a sleepy Sunday stillness reigns—every green lattice is shut on the white front of each small house, no one stirs abroad, the wooden pavements blister in the August sun. The black wharves project into the harbor, old, decaying, with the ceaseless wash and fret of the rippling tide, slipping in and out forever among their rotting planks. St. Ann's, always drowsy, lies sluggishly asleep, this warm, dusty, midsummer afternoon.

A letter awaits Vera—a note, rather—in a hand she knows well. She tears it open in a second, and runs her eye over its three or four sentences. He has received hers. He is glad that she is glad. He will do what he can to make her happy. He hopes she will never regret this step. He will be with them by ten o'clock on Friday, the twenty-third. Dr. Englehart will accompany him. And he is very affectionately hers, R. C. F.

It is a disappointing little billet—it is not in the least what Vera expects. Such short sentences! and so few of them. She could do better herself! And he is used to writing letters, too—has she not seen them?—long, learned letters, full of polysyllabic words that Vera could neither spell nor pronounce if it were ever so, letters that are printed in stupid scientific quarterlies, heavier than lead. Such a short, scrubby, unsatisfactory——

"And what does he mean by regretting?" she cries out

resentfully: "as if I was ever likely to regret. When I told him, too, I was *delighted*. I think he might very well have made it a whole page. Such a nice, long letter as I sent him. And the very first he has ever written to me! I must say——"

"No, you mustn't. Captain Ffrench is very busy just now, remember," says Dora, smoothly, "and has very little time for letter-writing. He will not fail on the twenty-third—that is the main thing."

"Fail!" repeats Vera, staring; but Dora only laughs, and whips up the ponies.

There is silence. Vera feels aggrieved, and looks it. This is not the sort of thing she has expected at all. If this is what they call a love-letter, then she doesn't think much of love-letters. If he means to send her six mean, stingy sentences every time he writes from Honduras, he may keep them! She will tell him her opinion of this effusion the next time they meet.

But though Captain Ffrench's first note to his bride-elect is as brief and non-committal as note well can be, he writes to his step-father, on the same subject, a sufficiently lengthy epistle.

"The more I think of it," he says, "the more abundantly convinced am I that this sacrifice is at once absurd and unnecessary. In the first moments of bewilderment, and overwhelmed by the tears and reproaches of Miss Lightwood, I was all at sea, but now I know, I feel, when it is too late to draw back, that this Quixotic marriage is utterly nonsensical. The accident of Vera's having remained a night at Shaddeck with me could never spoil her future life as this marriage may—as this marriage must. What does she know of herself—of marriage? She is a girl in years, a babe in knowledge of the world. In the time that is to come she may bitterly rue this union, into which accident and woman's prudery are driving me. Of myself I say little. In the future, whatever I can do to make her happy I trust I shall do. To like her as a child is easy, to love her as a woman may be impossible. Who is to foretell what kind of woman any given girl of sixteen may make? I have no more wish

to sacrifice my life to a scruple of propriety than other men, but having pledged myself to her sister, at any cost to myself, I shall keep my word.

"During the term of my absence, it becomes a simple matter of necessity that Vera shall remain under your care, either at Charlton with a competent governess, or some good school. I should naturally prefer a convent, as we are both Catholics. As you are one of the chief advocates of the marriage, I have no hesitation in making this claim upon you. Vera must be your exclusive charge until my return. When that return may be, it is impossible exactly to say, and if in the chapter of accidents I should never return at all, I appeal to your generosity to provide for the poor child's life. That non-return would probably be the best thing that could befall; it would give her back her freedom and the average chance at least of happiness with a husband of her own choice."

Mr. Charlton reads this letter with compressed lips and angry eyes. He usually passes his correspondence of late over to Miss Lightwood—he has got into a way of making her his amanuensis, but for obvious reasons he says nothing of this. He locks it up in his desk, and does not answer it. So after all the headstrong, obstinate fool is going. Wife or no wife he will keep his word to the expedition and start for Honduras. Since it must be so, he might as well have gone free as fettered—so far as Mr. Charlton is concerned the result will be the same. He chooses Englehart and Central America instead of his step-father and Charlton. He must abide by that choice. Fortunes, as a rule, do not go begging; he will force no man to be his heir.

But he loves the lad—oh! he loves him, and it is hard. It is hard to let him go, hard to feel he may never look in his face again, hard to feel that his affection is unreturned. He covers his face with a sort of groan. He is an old man, he grows frail fast, he has counted on Dick as the prop of his last years. Now those years must be passed alone—not even a wife can hold the boy back Well! well! at least if he cannot command his obedience, he can make him pay the penalty of his self-will. Keep, and provide for Vera. Yes, he is ready enough to do that; it will be a pleasure, a com-

fort, to keep something young and bright about him, and he is ready to acknowledge her claim; but no one can fill his wayward step-son's place, no one ever can or will.

"Has Captain Ffrench written to Mr. Charlton?" Dora asks, one day, as Mr. Charlton remains moodily silent "He sent Vera two or three lines simply to say he would be here with Dr. Englehart at ten on Friday morning, but not a word of his future intentions. And for Vera's sake I am anxious to know whether he means to go or stay."

"He means to go," is the gloomy answer.

"And Vera, sir?"

"Vera is my care; she remains with me, of course. She must have a governess, and spend the next two years in hard study. She will be over eighteen then, and a young woman —let us hope a clever and accomplished one—amiable I am sure she will be, and good. His absence—confound him!—will not extend over that period. Dick is a good-tempered fellow as ever breathed, but as pig-headed as the majority when he sets his mind on a thing. And he seems to consider it a question of honor here," says Mr. Charlton, trying, in spite of himself, to make the best of it to a third party.

Dora sits silently, playing nervously with her watch-chain, which, with its essential appendage, is a recent and expensive present from her host.

"You need have no fears for Vera, my dear Dora," he goes on; "it shall be at once my happiness and my duty to provide for her. I am glad she is to remain. Charlton will be lonely enough soon, Heaven knows."

"It is not that, sir," Dora says, and covers her face with her hands. "I am selfish—I was thinking of myself. She is all I have—we two are so utterly alone; and when I go back to the old life and leave her here——" She breaks down, and lifts two lovely, streaming eyes. "Oh, forgive me!" she sobs. "What will you think of me? But—but——"

Mr. Charlton is moved to the depths of his genial, kindly

old heart. A poor little woman in tears is always, he holds, a pathetic sight; a pretty little woman in tears is something to subjugate the universe. But he never quite knows what to say on these supreme occasions.

"I have known so little pleasure, so little happiness in my short life," sobs Dora, behind a perfumed bit of lace and lawn—very well for this sort of thing, but ridiculous if taken in connection with a cold in the head. "It has been all work, work, work, since the cruel war that robbed us of everything. And now that I have known Charlton and *you*, sir——" Sobs choke her utterance—language fails.

This is flattering—Mr. Charlton feels it so. His *amour propre* has just received a mortal wound—the artless confession between the flowing tears of lovely woman is as a soothing salve. And she is so pretty—crying does not spoil Dora, nor redden the point of her pretty nose. If it did you may be sure Miss Lightwood would give idle tears a wide berth. She is so pretty, so forlorn, so young, so—so everything that can addle the brain of a good-hearted, simple-souled old gentleman. He rises and bends above her, deeply moved, and tries to take away the dampened scrap of handkerchief from before the pale, tear-wet face.

"Dora! my dear Dora—my dear child, don't—I beg of you, don't. Why go at all? Charlton is a large house, and I am a very lonely man. Stay with your sister, stay with her always, stay with me. She will need you—*I* will need you, the house will need you. Stay with me as—as my daughter."

Miss Lightwood starts to her feet as if stung. Two blue, soft, tearful, sad, reproachful eyes look at him a moment. "As your daughter?" murmurs a choking voice; "and I —in my madness, have—— No, no, it can never be!" And then she breaks from him with an inarticulate sobbing sound, and rushes out of the room, and upstairs, and into her own.

"And if *that* does not open his nonsensical old eyes,"

says Miss Lightwood, briskly, going over to the glass and adjusting her front frizzes, "I will speak a little plainer next time."

"And be sure it has a tail—train, I mean—at least one yard long—not a finger-length less, Mrs. Jones, and make the waist as puffy as you can, so that I may look as if I had a tendency to *embonpoint*—which I haven't. And as I am not to have a bustle, my sister says, I want you to fix some arrangement of stiff muslin that will do instead—you understand? But whatever else you do, make the train a—full—yard—long."

Thus emphatically Miss Vera Martinez to the dressmaker. She stands in the middle of the room, solemnly gesticulating, her face wearing all the gravity—the seriousness of the point at issue demands. A shimmering pile of creamy white silk lies near the dress in question, to which the yard-long tail is to be appended and is Miss Martinez's wedding robe.

"And do not fail us on Thursday afternoon," says a second voice, sharp, and a trifle imperious; "the—the dinner-party occurs on Friday, and there must not be the slightest delay, Mrs. Jones. We will drive over about four on Thursday, and fetch it away."

"There shall be no delay, Miss Lightwood, I never fail my customers, and I have no other work just now."

"If this—party dress, is a success you shall have an abundance of work in future, Mrs. Jones—I can promise you that," says Miss Lightwood, graciously, drawing on her gloves. "Come, Vera. Do not forget my instructions about the point-lace trimming, Mrs. Jones."

"And do not forget *my* instructions about the train, Mrs. Jones," says the more youthful voice, "a yard long. Mind that!"

She holds up an admonitory finger.

"One—yard—long!" she reiterates, and then goes after her sister out to where the pony-phaeton stands.

"And I hope to goodness she wont make a botch of it," says Dora, taking the reins. "Put not your faith in country dressmakers. If there only had been time to order it from Madame Le Brun's," with a regretful sigh.

"And I hope to goodness she wont shorten it behind," says Vera. "The rest may go; but, fit or no fit, a train to it I must have. To think of a white silk dress like wrinkled skins on scalded milk, as somebody says somewhere, with a train trailing a full yard behind!" says Vera, in a sort of solemn rapture.

"Only four days now—how they do fly! I told Harriet before I came out, Vera."

"Yes?" says Vera, giving a smart slap to a musquito that alights on her nose; "and what did she say? Did she snap your head off?"

Harriet is the Charlton housekeeper, a maiden lady of uncertain age and temper, and not a person to have household secrets from.

"Not exactly. She was snappish, though, as usual, and grumbled about the shortness of the time, and the length of the coming breakfast. Vera, I shall send that old maid about her business one of these days."

"*You* will!" says Vera. "Upon my word! You had better wait until Mr. Charlton can fill her place, I think."

"Mr. Charlton *has* filled her place, my dear."

"Has he? Who is the new one? I feel interested naturally—a housekeeper can make things dreadfully unpleasant when she likes. Another old maid?"

"No—o—not exactly—getting along though. The new housekeeper will be a married lady, Vera," says Dora, and laughs. "I think you will like her. It was I who recommended her to Mr. Charlton's notice. But it is a secret yet—you are not to say a word to him or any one."

"When is she coming?"

"Well—that is not quite decided either. But this fall

some time, for certain. I think Harriet will not be the only old woman in Charlton her advent will astonish.' Dora laughs again at some inward joke.

"I wonder when Mrs. Charlton means to go?" says Vera, appositely enough.

"Not a day sooner than she is obliged. Nasty old thing—she is exactly like an over-fed tabby cat. The idea of her pretending neuralgia, and Mr. Charlton taking it in good faith, until I undeceived him. I mean to tell her on Thursday evening."

"About the housekeeper?"

"No; about your wedding. How furious she will be, and how she will try to hide it, and what a death's-head stare and smile she will give me. I expect to enjoy it. She made so sure of getting that poor Dick for a son-in-law. By the way, have you answered his letter, Vera?"

"I would not demean myself by answering such a scrubby little affair," answers Vera, with dignity. "I never *will* write to him if he sends me such notes from Honduras, and so I mean to tell him. Here we are, and there is Mr. Charlton waiting for us."

Mr. Charlton is always waiting for them of late, for Dora, at least, and within the last two days seems to have ascended into the rosy realms of bliss. Perhaps it is the prospect of a wedding that brightens him, perhaps it is the joy of speedy emancipation from the iron rule of Harriet—at all events the change is there. And Mrs. Charlton at her window, like an elderly Sister Anne on her watch-tower, glooms down upon them, and has a vague feeling that something is going on from which she is excluded. Mr. Charlton is as plastic wax in the hands of Dora Lightwood; there is no vagueness about that, at least, and his infatuation bodes ill for her prolonged stay at Charlton.

One, two, three—the bright days fly. It is Thursday, and the eve of the wedding. Vera gets up early, but that is one

of Vera's virtues. To-morrow Captain Dick will come—to-morrow is her wedding-day—to-morrow she will see him, speak to him, belong to him her whole life long. The thought is rapturous. And how lucky the weather is fine—quite "queen's weather"—not a cloud in the sky. Vera feels it would go near to break her heart to be married in a rain-storm. Friday is an ominous day, an unfashionable day, an out-of-the-way sort of day to be married on. Captain Dick ought to have known better than to select it, but men are dreadfully obtuse about matrimonial matters. So that the priest, and the bride, and the bridegroom are there, they actually seem to think other things secondary. Vera's state is not one of unalloyed bliss. Captain Dick is going away; it *may* rain; there is never any trusting the weather at picnics or weddings. And she has her doubts about that train; if Mrs. Jones, possessed by some spirit malignant, should curtail it. Such things have been known. Harriet, too, is still grumbling about the breakfast. No change in her own appearance has taken place. Bones and sallowness are precisely as they were; her hair has not grown perceptibly longer; her form has not assumed any observable redundancy; she is neither handsomer, taller, plumper, wiser than if to-morrow were not her wedding-day. She is afraid, seriously afraid, Captain Dick may be disappointed. He must have seen very many pretty women lately. She knows what sort of faces are to be seen on the streets of New York; it will be a crushing thing if he looks disappointed. Vera's musings run something in this way. Of the real seriousness, of the awful life-long nature of the step she is taking, she thinks not at all. She is to be married to Captain Dick; she likes that. She would like to go wandering with him over the world—up among the icebergs, down among the cocoa-nut groves, to "Sail the seas over," to see foreign parts, to be wrecked with him on desert islands, and live in nice little huts, and eat breadfruit and yams (Vera

rather confounds this fruit with small sugar-cured portions of pig, hung up in yellow bags outside of groceries) and dried grapes, and bring up goats in the way they should go, and have a lovely time all by themselves, in some emerald isle of the Pacific.

Vague, foolish, romantic, nonsensical, are all Vera's dreams; but always, clear and bright, strong, noble, tall, upright, handsome, peerless, her hero stands, the central figure. Go where she will, Vera knows she will never see his like.

Breakfast time comes; luncheon comes; afternoon comes Harriet's brow is lowering; Mr. Charlton looks fidgety and nervous; Vera's pulses thrill and flutter. Dora alone is calm, intrepid, cool of head, steady of pulse, clear of eye, equal to any fate. No one of the household knows except the aforesaid Harriet, whose gloomy forte is secrecy. No one outside the household knows, except Father Damer, pastor of the little white church of the Assumption, on the hill, and with him silence is duty. Dora professes no religion whatever in the frankest manner, but Vera is a Cuban, and a devout little daughter of Mother Church, and jealously insists on having her nuptial mass, and all the bridal blessings Father Damer can bestow. Nothing further has been heard from the bridegroom, but he will not fail—no one has ever known the ex-cavalry captain to fail at the post of duty or danger. This is both.

At four, precisely, the pony phaeton draws up in front of Mrs. Jones' front door. The dress is finished, the train—Vera gives one terrified glance that changes slowly to ecstasy as it is spread out before her—it is every inch the train. She draws a long breath of relief, and sits down on a chair, as though this realization of all the dreams of her life was too much for her.

"It has preyed on my mind," she says, faintly, "it has preyed on my mind to that extent—Dot, you know I

couldn't take half my lunch this noon. I felt sure it would be short."

It is not short—it is not a misfit; it satisfies even Miss Lightwood. It is packed and put in the carriage, and then they sweep through St. Ann's to make a few last purchases. When she drives along these streets next, Vera thinks, it will be as Mrs. Captain Ffrench—Mrs. R. C. Ffrench—Mrs. Véronica Mary Martinez Ffrench—Mrs. Dick Ffrench—Vera Ffrench.

She has rung the changes on this most exquisite cognomen over and over again. She has written it in every possible and impossible style of chirography some five hundred times; she has repeated it aloud, to hear how it sounds. To-morrow by this time she will have ceased to be Vera Martinez and become Vera Ffrench; and Captain Dick—*her husband*—this time to-morrow will be back in New York, and the long, long separation will have begun. He will stay with them but a few hours—has he not said so?—and the next day he sails. Ah! no fear of her forgetting that. Through all the foolishness, through all the childishness, through all the nonsense, that fact is ever present to sadden and subdue. He is going away.

An hour later, Mrs. Charlton, on her way upstairs, is waylaid by Miss Lightwood, a smile on her lip, and malice prepense in her eye.

"Come into Vera's room a moment, will you, please, Mrs. Charlton? I have something to show you."

Mrs. Charlton eyes her enemy distrustfully. An armed neutrality obtains at present, but open hostilities are imminent at any moment between these conflicting forces.

"Something to show me, Miss Lightwood——" she is stiffly beginning, but Dora cuts in:

"Oh, come!" she says, airily; "I will not detain you a moment. And I think it will surprise even *you*."

Curiosity has its full share in Mrs. Charlton; it is stronger

even than her hearty desire to disoblige Miss Lightwood. She follows suspiciously.

"This way," Dora says, and leads on into her own sleeping-room.

And then indeed Mrs. Charlton starts, stares, is dumb. For before the glass stands Vera—*is* it Vera?—that graceful figure in trailing white silk, silk rich enough to "stand alone," with the cloud of illusion on its head and dropping to the carpet, and that virginal orange crown? Around the slim neck is a rope of pearls fit for a Russian princess, in the small ears pearls, on the slender hands glittering gems, on the taper feet white satin shoes. It is Vera; but a transfigured Vera. Dress does make a difference. In sweeping white silk and pearls, it is a very different girl from the romp in short dresses who races, flushed and breathless, with Nero up and down the Charlton woods.

"What—*what* is it?" she asks.

"It is Vera's wedding-dress," says Dora, and her blue eyes go like two dagger-points through her enemy's corslet; "and to-morrow is Vera's wedding-day!"

Mrs. Charlton can by no possibility stare harder than she is staring already—if she could there is no doubt but that at this announcement her eyes would drop from their orbits.

"Her—wedding—day!"

"Her wedding-day my *dear*, Mrs. Charlton. She has stolen a march on us older and wiser ones. Only sixteen—is it not a shame? but Captain Ffrench *would* have it. And the dress—is it not exquisite? And those pearls, look at them, Mrs. Charlton, nearer please—you are short-sighted like myself—the finest set in Tiffany's. Are they not fit for a duchess? And this point—but perhaps you are not a judge of point. Unless one is in the profession, as I am, one is apt to see so little of real point lace. The veil is only illusion—there was no time to import a bridal veil. Does

not white become her, gypsy though she is? Turn round Vera, and let Mrs. Charlton see the train—perfect, is it not?"

Vera slowly revolves like a great wax-work. Through the veil she looks almost ethereal—so slight, so white, so misty.

"Married to-morrow!" Mrs. Charlton can but just gasp.

"Sudden, isn't it? but he is obliged to go the next day; and as I say, he would have it. It is by his wish, too, that we have not told you—or any one," after a malicious pause.

"Now that your horrid neuralgia is better—oh! what an inconvenient thing is that neuralgia! you will be able to come with us to church. The marriage is to take place at the Assumption at eleven, with a mass and the whole nuptial ritual of the Catholic Church. Then we return to a *déjeuner*, and after that, I regret to say, poor Captain Ffrench is obliged to leave us. That tiresome expedition you know, and he is such a man of honor that he would not on any account go from his word."

Mrs. Charlton is beginning to recover. The suddenness of the blow has partially stunned her, but now she draws her breath, and looks at her daring, triumphant, malicious little foe.

"A man of honor?" she repeats; "so it seems, and the greatest fool under heaven! Do you really mean to tell me that——"

"Vera dear, we will leave you," says Dora sweetly. "Be very careful not to rumple the things taking them off. Now if you are ready, Mrs. Charlton——"

She has her out of the room and into the hall, before Mrs. Charlton actually knows what she is about. Then Dora faces her swiftly, fiercely.

"If you say one word before Vera, you will repent it to the last day of your life," she exclaims, and there is something so wicked in her eyes that the elder woman recoils The next moment she is gone—rustling down the staircase, and cowed and vanquished Mrs. Charlton goes to her room.

Vera does not descend to dinner—Dora orders her rations to the maiden bower. Mr. Charlton, more and more nervous as the dreaded hour draws near, sits silent and out of sorts. Mrs. Charlton is glum and speechless. Dora is cheerful and chatty, but nothing can lift the ante-nuptial gloom. In her heart she too is nervous, and worried, and anxious to have it all over. It is such an abnormal sort of wedding and even men of honor may fail. Something may happen, Dr. Englehart may pooh-pooh him out of it—she will not breathe freely until half-past eleven to-morrow. By that time, if all goes well——.

Dinner proceeds, dessert ends, there is the drawing-room, more silence, and vague despondency. Darkness falls, the summer night lies over the world, and restless and worried Dora goes out under the whispering trees, and looks up at her sister's windows.

"And if all *does* go well I hope she may be happy," she says with a touch of vague fear and compunction, "poor little Vera."

CHAPTER XIX.

CAPTAIN DICK'S WEDDING.

ONCE more the sun has risen, and shines for the last time in all the days of its shining on Vera Martinez. For when it reaches the zenith yonder, there will be no Vera Martinez any more, but in her place Vera Ffrench, the bride. She has not a very bride-like look just at this moment, standing by the window, blinking up anxiously at the rising luminary, to make quite sure there are no ominous mare's tails in the horizon, with a print

dressing-gown thrown around her, and her short crop of boyish black curls standing up on end. It is about five, and she has just got up, amazed, and a trifle disgusted with herself to find she has slept like a top all night. "I don't expect to sleep a wink until morning," she had said solemnly the last thing to her sister, and lo! before the curly head was fairly on the pillow, deceitful slumber stole upon her, and claimed her for its own. After all, how little of a heroine she is—she sighs as she thinks of it; heroines *always* keep awake, and sit by their casements the night before they are married. Vera has not yet attained the age or experience that gives us "white nights"—those long, blank, awful, sleepless hours of darkness, when the rest of creation snores, and we alone lie with aching eyeballs, feverish, tossing, nervous, cross, wondering if the lagging day will ever dawn. It is her wedding—her wedding-day! Now that it is here she cannot quite realize it. It means something more than she knows of surely, else why do all girls, heroines or not, look upon it as the one grand epoch of their lives, the pivot upon which their whole future existence is to turn.

"I am such a little fool," the girl thinks, despondently, "I don't know anything. I wonder what Captain Dick can see in me. I am not fit to be anybody's wife, much less his. He is so learned, so clever, so good, he knows so much—what would he say if he knew I never did a sum in vulgar fractions in my life, and couldn't parse two sentences to save me. I think, after all, I am glad he is going away; it will give me a chance to get over being such an awful dunce. At least I am not glad, and two years is a dreadful time, but still—— Oh! Dot, isn't it just the heavenliest morning, after all!"

"After all?" repeats Dora, coming in. "Who ever expected it was going to be anything else? Good-morning, Mrs. Ffrench—how did you sleep?'

Vera acknowledges shame-facedly that she never slept better in her life, and inquires the time.

"Nearly six," Dora says, looking at her pretty watch. You must not think of dressing before ten. As your hair looks rather better uncombed than combed, your toilet need not take long. Doing one's hair is always the worst. You shall have breakfast up here. I will breakfast with you if you like—then you can take your bath, and after that I will dress you. As we do not start for church until nearly eleven there is time and to spare."

"I wish I could go out," says Vera, looking wistfully down to where Nero stands on the lawn, looking wistfully up, and wondering why his mistress does not come for her matutinal game of romps; "and look at poor Nero. I declare if he isn't watching my window. Just one race, Dot—no one need know."

But Dora will not hear of it. Vera is to understand that her romping days are over. "Respectable married women (by the way, I wonder why married women are always stigmatized respectable) do not as a rule get up at five in the morning, and go scampering over the country with the house-dog. We are going to change all that, and for the time to come Mrs. R. C. Ffrench is to behave *herself*." Then Dora goes, for she has very much to do this morning, and hides an anxious heart under her tight French corsets. There is the sour and surly Harriet to conciliate, if she can; there is Mrs. Charlton to keep an eye on, for Mrs. Charlton looked dangerous last night; there is Mr. Charlton to string up to concert pitch, and be put in a proper frame of mind to meet this contumacious step-son. Vera must be kept prisoner in her room, partly because it is the proper thing to do, and partly because there is no trusting her in the company of Mrs. Charlton. Impossible to tell what that vicious old harridan may not venomously flash out, and if Vera only knows the truth, or half the truth, silly, and childish, and

uninformed as she is, Dora knows that all hope of a wedding to-day will be at an end. Vera is woman enough for this, although she has hardly outgrown hoops and skipping-ropes, therefore Dora locks her sister coolly in her chamber, and carries off the key. After half-past eleven Mrs. Charlton may say what she pleases, the ceremony once safely over, and though she talks until crack o' doom, she will not talk the ring off Vera Ffrench's finger.

Breakfast comes. Mrs. Charlton comes. Dangerous!—no need to look twice to see that. If it is in her power to do mischief to-day, she will do it. Dora stands for a second and eyes her coolly, steadily, unflinchingly; the elder woman returns the gaze with eyes that gleam like dull stones. It is the look of two well-matched duellists just before *en garde* is cried. So far Miss Lightwood has had the best of it, but the wheel goes round, and she who is on top at nine in the morning may be at the bottom by nine at night. Mrs. Charlton smiles, a slow, cruel, unsmiling smile.

"Is not our bride coming to breakfast, Dora, my dear," she asks.

"Brides generally breakfast in their own room, Mrs. Charlton. When one has had nothing to do with brides and bridals for half a century, one naturally forgets. You accompany us to church, I suppose?"

"I will be in at the death, my dear. Ha! ha! Eleven I think you said? My poor old gray silk will have to do. And the happy man"—another spectral ha! ha! here—"at what hour are we to look for him?"

"It is not necessary that you should look for him at any hour, Mrs. Charlton. Pray don't give yourself that trouble. Young men are so ungrateful, and do so cordially hate to have well-meaning, elderly ladies look out for them. Good-morning, Mr. Charlton. We are before you, you see. I hope you are feeling quite well, sir?"

"Pretty well, my dear, pretty well," Mr. Charlton answers

flurriedly. "Good-morning, ma'am. Tea this morning, Dora, my dear; coffee makes my hand shaky. How is the neuralgia, Mrs. Charlton?"

"The neuralgia is very much better, Mr. Charlton. I trust *you* feel no twinges of your old enemy, the gout? It would be such a pity if you could not go to church this morning and give away the bride. Our dear Miss Lightwood, who can do almost anything, can hardly do that. You see I am informed of the happy event. The notice was short, but among relatives, and for so *strictly* private an affair, longer was not needed. And poor Captain Ffrench is really going to pay the penalty of that rash child's imprudence after all! Dear! dear! dear!"

"How grateful Captain Ffrench would be for your sympathy, to be sure!" says Dora, mockingly. "Such a pity he is not here to hear it! So great a favorite as you are of his, too! I should think, now, you are the sort of elderly lady young men would *always* be fond of. And that reminds me. Do you happen to know a young gentleman by the name of Ernest, Mrs. Charlton?"

Mrs. Charlton looks across at her, murder in her eye. It is vulgar, it is lowering herself in the eyes of her host, Dora feels, this war of words, but for the life of her she cannot help hitting back.

"I *have* known a young gentleman by the name of Ernest, Miss Lightwood. May I ask his other name?"

But Dora only smiles—a smile that has a volume of meaning.

"He is a very dear friend of Nelly's, is he not?" she asks. "I wonder why he did not come to the house when he called upon her instead of——"

Mrs. Charlton lays down her knife and fork, and her face turns to a leaden lividness.

"But, there!" cries Dora; "perhaps I am indiscreet. I have no business to betray poor, dear Nelly's secrets. No,

Mrs. Charlton, I positively decline to say another word My overhearing was purest accident. I came upon them one night by chance. Only"—and here she looks steadily across at the furious face before her—"I wouldn't say too much about Vera's imprudence if I were you. Vera is a child of sixteen, and her imprudence was unpremeditated. If she were three and twenty, and made and kept assignations by night and by stealth down there in the grounds with clandestine lovers, it would be another thing. Mr. Charlton, I really must beg your pardon for this. It is in atrocious taste, I know, and makes you horribly uncomfortable, but it is forced upon me. I wish to say no more—if I am permitted to keep my own counsel."

She rises abruptly, and quits the room, and Mr. Charlton, with a hastily muttered apology, and in abject terror, follows her example. And if Mrs. Charlton could drop an ounce or so of prussic acid in the wine Miss Lightwood expects to drink when next she sits at table, she has all the good will in the world at this moment to do it.

There is no more time for recrimination; it is half-past nine. Dora hastens up to make her own toilet, and makes it more expéditiously than she ever dressed *en grande tenue* before. After all it is simple—a pale pink silk, an elaborate coiffure, with orange flowers and pale roses. Her resolute little hands shake as she fastens buttons and hair-pins. Her encounter with her enemy has excited her; she has given and expects no quarter. If the old wretch waylays Dick Ffrench, and gets him all to herself for ten minutes——. Dora sets her teeth. Let her try it! Ffrench is not the man to listen to innuendoes; Dora knows that from mortifying experience; his rebuff will be short and curt enough. It is Vera she is afraid of. Vera must not be left a moment unguarded until all is over.

Vera is roaming about her room, restless, fidgety, growing feverish and excited in turn. How slowly the moments drag.

She is surprised to find she cannot eat. Sleep has been her faithful friend, but appetite has deserted her. What does Dot mean by locking her up? She is not going to run away. What did Mrs. Charlton mean by calling Captain Dick a fool yesterday?—"the greatest fool under heaven!" Was it because he was going to marry *her?* Dot says it is pure spite, and perhaps it is; she certainly did want him for Eleanor. How odd and queer it will seem to meet Captain Dick *now.* Her heart beats at the thought of it. She never felt shy of him before, but she turns hot and uncomfortable now at the idea.

Dora comes at last, and dressing begins. Vera watches her with interest, wondering to see how pale she is, and how excited her eyes look. This too ends, and it is Vera's turn. Dora does everything. With deft, skilled fingers she makes the most of the curly crop, and the soft, shining rings lie close about the small, shapely head. The trained white silk is on, and buttoned up; a bouquet of sweet white blossoms, all dewy and fresh, is fastened in the corsage; the pearls are clasped, those lovely moonlight "congealed tears;" the ear-rings are going in, when "low on the sand, and loud on the stone," there comes the quick crash of carriage wheels.

Dora stops in her work; Vera seizes the table, and for one giddy, strange moment, the room, the whole world, swims round in mist. She does not know why, but it gives her a shock, a sharp, blinding shock, and every pulse seems to stop beating.

"Here they are," cries Dora triumphantly; "here is Dr. Englehart, and here is Richard Ffrench. Vera, come and peep."

But Vera does not stir. Wondering, Dora turns, and sees her all in a second gone deathly white.

"Good heavens! she is going to faint! Why, you shocking little idiot! Here, drink this! What on earth is the matter with you?"

"I—don't—know. It was so sudden. Oh! Dora, I wonder if he is glad."

"Glad?"

"Glad—happy that it is his wedding-day. Oh! I am afraid, I am afraid! Now that it is here—I don't know why, it seems so strange, so unreal, so *awful!* Are you sure—sure, mind—that there is no mistake, that he really and truly wants me to marry him?"

Dora stares at her, amaze, anger, consternation in her face.

"Vera," she says, "I always knew you were a little fool, but that you were *such* a little fool, I never knew until to-day. Why, you unparalleled goose, did you not get his letter? has Mr. Charlton not talked to you? is he not here now? And yet to go at the last moment——"

"I won't say another word," Vera says, humbly. "Dot, how does he look?"

"Oh!—like an unfledged arch-angel of course! big and brown, and solemn as an owl. I foresee we are to have a deadly—lively wedding—Mrs. Charlton for the *tête de mort*, and the bridegroom for the marble guest. Now draw on your gloves, and let us go down. There is Mr. Charlton tapping at the door, and it is ten minutes of eleven."

"Shall—shall I not see him except before everybody?" stammers Vera. Her hands feel cold and shaky, her voice trembles, she forgets even to look at the glass.

"No!" sharply. "What need? you have all the rest of your life to look at him. Whatever you want to say must keep until after he comes back from Honduras. Here, come on, I don't know what makes me so nervous this morning. Weddings are always nervous sort of things I suppose. Come."

Mr. Charlton is waiting, he draws the gloved hand of the little brown bride through his arm, with a reassuring smile And thus they are down-stairs—Vera feels that she is walk-

ing in her sleep—and in the drawing-room, where two gentlemen stand. A mist is before her eyes, she clings fast to the protecting arm, and through that mist sees her hero approach. She does not look up, in all her bright life she has never felt so shy, and frightened, and queer—the beating of her heart seems alone enough to stifle her. One desire, one wild, desperate, desire, she is conscious of—to run away from them all, and never stop until she reaches New York. A smile is breaking up the gravity of Captain Dick's face—he holds out his hand.

"Vera!" he says. At his voice it all clears away, and she looks up. It is the old pleasant, half quizzical look, she knows so well, and it is the dear, handsome, familiar, smiling face that bends down. She has no time to speak, for Mr. Charlton is introducing Dr. Englehart, who looks at her with keen, steely, searching eyes. The keen, steely glance ends in a smile, half-puzzled, half-amused, with an underlying touch of sarcasm, and then he makes a courtly bow. Then he is presented to Dora, then to Mrs. Charlton, and then—still in a somnambulistic state, Vera finds herself in the carriage and on the way to church. Not a word has been exchanged between her and Captain Dick; he has spoken her name, given her a friendly look, and a warm hand-clasp, and is following after. Mr. Charlton, by her side, is recalling, in a perturbed way, that Dora and Mrs. Charlton are shut up together, and he wonders helplessly if they will fight. If it ever comes to blows, Mrs. Charlton will have the best of it! Now they are whirling through St. Ann's, in a cloud of white dust, that necessitates closed windows, and more slowly up the sloping hill, crowned with a humble little wooden church, the "sign of hope to man" glittering from the spire. Now they have stopped—not a creature is to be seen, and now they are out and going up the nave, and the candles are lit on the altar, and in a moment Father Damer appears, vested with a little white and red acolyte following. Oh! how

strange, how solemn it all is! She trembles, she is cold and white, her eyes rest on the priest with a dilated, unnatural look. "Richard, wilt thou take Veronica, here present, for thy lawful wife, according to the rite of our holy Mother, the church?" She turns upon him a startled glance—if he were to respond, "No, father—certainly not," it would not surprise her in the least. But he answers instead, "I will," and then Father Damer turns to her, and asks the same, and Dora has to give her an unseen poke before she remembers it is *her* turn to say "I will." And then her long five-button glove is drawn off, and Mr. Charlton gives her away, and with her hand clasped fast in his, Richard Ffrench's deep voice is saying:

"I, Richard, take thee, Véronica, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part, if holy church will it permit; and thereto I plight thee my troth."

And now the ring is blessed, and on, and Father Damer is reading a long Latin prayer, and once, before it ends, she steals a glance at the bridegroom. How grave he is—but beyond that earnest gravity she can read nothing. He has taken her, she him—oh! how gladly—a thousand, thousand times, for life and death, and beyond death if she may! Her heart is full of love, of joy, of thankfulness. In all the world there is no one like him, and he is hers, her very own for all time! The last blessing is given—it is all over, they are man and wife. Some thought brings a sudden rush of tears to her eyes; she lifts them to his, and meets the strangest glance in return! She does not understand it—is it sorrow—is it passionate regret? Surely not—it passes in that glance, and they are in the vestry, signing the register, and Dot has kissed her with shining, triumphant eyes, and Father Damer has shaken hands smilingly, and wished her a long and happy married life. He has been invited to the

wedding feast, but duty calls him elsewhere and he cannot come. And this, too, is over, and they are out of the church and back in the carriages, and it is her husband who is beside her. They flash back over the same dusty road, the same sleepy streets—the world is the same, yet everything is changed. She does not speak, she is afraid to speak, afraid of him as he sits here, so silent, so thoughtful, so changed. What is he thinking of? and how little is he like her Captain Dick! He was never grave, and mute, and pre-occupied like this. They are actually half-way home before he speaks one word. Then he takes the little dark hand, the left, and looks at the shining hoop.

"It is the smallest I could get, but it is too large, Vera. What a pretty little hand you have—I never noticed before. So childish a hand, too, to wear a wedding ring!"

Is it a sigh she hears, a sigh smothered? She looks up quickly, he is smiling, but only his mouth, his eyes look grave.

"You are not sorry?" she says, wistfully.

"Sorry, dear? Why should I be? I was always fond of my little Vera. Have you been talking to Mr. Charlton? Has he told you of our arrangements?"

"I am to stay, and go to school, or have a governess. I need it surely," Vera answers, slowly. "I mean to study very hard, Captain Dick, so that you may not be ashamed of me when—when you come back."

"I could never be ashamed of you. All the same, study hard—you have four good years yet before you are a woman."

"Are you going to be away four years?" she asks, a little tremor in the shy voice, a startled glance in the brown eyes —"four long years?"

"Who knows?" he says, with an impatient sigh, and the eyes that look away from her are full of pain. "Not I. Very likely not, but in any case you are to write to me, re-

member—that is an old compact you know, little Vera, and whenever I chance to be near a post town, I will drop you a line. Grow up, study hard, write me long letters, be as happy as a queen—that is to be the programme until my return."

"And *then?*" the dark, solemn uplifted eyes ask. But she answers not, she does not get on with Captain Dick to-day. That odd, unpleasant feeling of shyness will not be shaken off. Why is his tone so serious? Why have his eyes that sad, dark, troubled look, a dreamy far away look too, as if they saw ever so far off, beyond and above her poor little schoolgirl life. She has never before felt so utterly apart from him, so nearly afraid of him, so little at her ease with him, as on this morning that has made her his wife. They have taken scores of *tête-à-tête* drives before, and their happy young laughter has rung out in unison; but Captain Dick looks at this moment as if he had never laughed in his life, and never meant to begin. Does the marriage ceremony affect all gentlemen in this unpleasant manner? For the first time in her life, she wishes the drive with Captain Dick would come to an end. She has her wish, they are going up the avenue. they are at the door. He springs out, hands her down, and draws her gloved hand under his arm.

"My wife!" he says, and for the first time the old smile flashes forth for a second. "That has an odd sound, has it not, Doña Vera?"

CHAPTER XX.

POST-NUPTIAL.

HARRIET of the flat figure and sour temper has at least the merit of being competent to the occasion, and the breakfast that awaits the bridal party is above reproach. But neither the appetite nor the spirits of the company do any sort of justice to it. A cloud hangs over the festive board, and though the feast is set, and the guests have met, there is little eaten and less said. Mr. Charlton, for the first time in his hospitable life, at the head of his own board, is neither social nor genial—his brows are knit, his glance is gloomy, his mouth looks stern. The bridegroom retains the silence and gravity that have wrapped him as a mantle since his coming. Once or twice, it is true, he makes an effort to rally, but it is so palpably an effort that it is rather a relief when he relapses. Mrs. Charlton does not speak one single word, except when once or twice directly addressed by courteous Dr. Englehart—no one else has the courage to attempt it. It would seem as though she had entered into a compact with herself to remain dead silent until an opportunity occurs of speaking fatally to the purpose. At least this is what Dora thinks—Dora watching her furtively and incessantly, and determined to balk her, if human vigilance can do it. It is up-hill work for Miss Lightwood; she is the only leaven to lighten the whole mass, and she comes up to time nobly, and does her best. The one wedding-guest seconds her efforts, thinking that in all his experience of wedding-breakfasts, this one stands dismally alone. As for the poor, little bewildered bride, a great vague terror is taking possession of her. Something is wrong, something is

abnormal and out of the common, something is the matter with everybody. Why does Captain Dick look like that, and so very unlike himself? Why is he so quiet, so depressed? What does it all mean? If he really wished to marry her, what business has he to look unhappy about it? and if he did *not* wish to marry her why has he done it? Oh! if she were not so stupid, so ignorant, so young! What is the matter with them all? People drink toasts, and make speeches at wedding-breakfasts, she has always understood, but no one does it here. Once, Dr. Englehart, with a kindly smile at the pale, startled face, proposes health and happiness to the bride, and Captain Dick responds. But it is only a flash in the pan, and the cloud settles again. A slow smile, a slow, cruel, "crawling" sort of smile, as Dora names it, actually crosses the grim face of Mrs. Charlton. The deadly oppression that hangs over the party is as "nuts" to her, in her present venomous mood.

It ends at last, just as Vera is beginning to stifle, and there is an adjournment to the drawing-room. And then, for the first time since his arrival, Mr. Charlton goes up to his step-son, looks him in the face, and addresses him.

"I wish you to come with me to my study for a moment, Captain Ffrench," he says, stiffly; "I will not detain you but a very brief time."

In all the years he has borne it, Mr. Charlton has never called him by his military title before. Dick reddens now, but he also smiles slightly.

"I am at your service, governor," he says, with a momentary return to his old cheery manner, "for as long a time as you like."

Dora, standing with Dr. Englehart, sees them go—so, too, does Mrs. Charlton. She also sees the bride escaping from among them, and flying out of the house and down the garden, regardless of damage to the white silk train—the apple of her eye and the pride of her heart but two brief hours

before. She sees everything and bides her time. That red signal-lamp, "Dangerous," is still up, and Dora feels that all her ablest strategy will be needed to outmanœuvre her here.

Vera makes her way down the gravelled paths towards a summer-house she knows of, embowered in a great green tangle of grape-vine. Fortunately the grass was rolled only yesterday—it has not rained for a week, so the bridal silk takes no damage. But bridal silks and sweeping trains have lost their charm; once more the world is hollow, and "things are not what they seem."

She is married to Captain Dick, all fast and firm; here is the ring shining in the sunlight; but Captain Dick looks very desperately out of sorts over it. *What* is the matter? *why* has he married her? She sinks down dejectedly on a low seat, and pushes the soft dark curls off her face with a hopeless, sorrowful sigh. Oh, dear, dear! his going away was bad enough, but this is a thousand times worse. And if it were not such a dense mystery. She used to think mysteries nice, and for that matter she likes them still—in weekly numbers; but for everyday, and where Captain Dick is concerned—no. If he didn't want to, why did he? She never asked him, his step-father never asked him—Dot says so. And if he did it because he liked her, and wished to of his own free will, why is he so sulky (that is the word Vera applies to her hero)—so sulky about it now? It is not like him, and he used to seem fond of her. Vera feels despondently that being married is not the blissful sort of thing unmarried people make it out. If she had known it was going to be like this, she would never have said yes; she would have seen both him and Dot further, first! There is something wrong. If they were good friends as they used to be, she would go and ask Captain Dick; but he is unlike himself, and she is in awe of him. Slow, miserable, disappointed tears gather in the forlorn little bride's eyes, and she wipes

them away gingerly with a bit of handkerchief that cost thirty dollars. She cannot even indulge in the luxury of a good cry with such a morsel of lace and lawn as this. She feels desolate and bereft, very much as Evangeline may when playing hide and seek with the runaway Gabriel, and unable to catch up with him.

In the study, a very stiff, and frozen, and petrified sort of conversation is going on. Mr. Charlton stands ominously erect and unbending; Captain Ffrench, with his elbow on the chimney-piece, confronting him, wears about as unbridegroom-like a face as can well be imagined. After all, Vera's hero is very mortal—like most heroes in private life—he feels just at this moment that it is sufficiently hard to have been badgered into marrying a slip of a school-girl, who may grow up into a frivolous doll like her sister, without being lectured and drawn over the coals, about leaving her, as Mr. Charlton has just been doing. Good Heavens! he thinks, despondently, what else is there to do, but leave her, and let the child grow up? What would he, what would any man in his senses do with a wife of sixteen, and the education and ideas of eleven?

"It is settled then," Mr. Charlton is saying in a slow, harsh sort of voice; "this is your ultimatum? You start for Honduras with the expedition to-morrow, and leave your wife with me? It would be a pity if we should misunderstand each other at the last. You positively go?"

"I positively go," Dick says, doggedly. "As for leaving my wife with you, governor, remember she is a wife forced upon me by you and Miss Lightwood—not one of my own choosing. She, poor child, is not to blame, and if she finds out by and by that this morning's work is a fatal mistake, I will at least have the consolation of knowing *I* never asked her to make the sacrifice. I am sorry we must part in anger; you have been so generous a friend and father——"

Mr. Charlton waves his hand in angry impatience.

"We will drop all that, if you please. Protestations of gratitude weigh little against ungrateful actions. Go, if you will, but understand this—all testamentary intentions I have ever had in your favor end with your going."

"You mentioned that before, you know, governor," Dick says, coolly. "It is not necessary to enter into it again. Leave your fortune to whom you please; it is entirely beside the question of my regret at your displeasure. And now if everything is said, with your permission I will rejoin Englehart and the ladies. The up train leaves St. Ann's at five; we must catch it. It is half-past three now."

"I have no more to say," the elder man responds, in cold, intense wrath; "do not let me detain you from your friend. We understand each other thoroughly now."

Dick holds out his hand.

"Come, governor," he says, "relax a little, won't you? Shake hands at least. This is a little too bad, after all that is past and gone."

But Mr. Charlton turns inflexibly away.

"You have chosen your path, and here we part forever. We will have no hypocritical pretence of friendship or regret. We part here; all is said in that."

A moment later, and Captain Ffrench is scanning the group in the drawing-room. Dr. Englehart has prevailed upon Miss Lightwood to lift the general despondency a little by singing for him. Dick Ffrench being safely closeted with his step-father, Vera having isolated herself from human ken, for the time being, Miss Lightwood feels she may relax her surveillance thus far. Consequently, when the bridegroom reconnoitres, she is in the midst of an Italian song, and Vera is nowhere visible. But Mrs. Charlton is exceedingly visible, and on the watch. She rises and approaches him.

"Captain Ffrench," she says, quickly, "will you let me speak to you one moment? I will not detain you

longer, and Vera is somewhere out there, if you want to find her."

Captain Dick looks surprised and a trifle bored. This is the second time to-day he has been privately interviewed, and informed he will not be detained a moment. He only hopes the coming *tête-à-tête* may be less personal and unpleasant than the past. He bows silently and follows, glancing at her askance in some distrust. It has already been mentioned that Captain Ffrench is abnormally afraid of this stout matron, and the eye of stone and brow of malignity look more stony and malignant at this moment than he has ever seen them. Some vengeanceful purpose is in her mind, something deucedly uncomfortable is coming, he feels, and he thrusts his hands in his pockets, and prepares himself darkly for the worst. She has a fixed place as well as purpose in view, it seems; the place is close to a small, rustic summer-house, crowned with a grapery. Close to this she takes her stand, and faces him.

"Now for it!" thinks the badgered bridegroom, with an inward groan.

"I cannot let you go, Captain Ffrench," begins Mrs. Charlton, in a strident voice, which he can feel turning his skin to "goose flesh" with its rasping vibration—"I *cannot* let you go without speaking one word. Your step-father is so completely under the control of Dora Lightwood—so utterly infatuated with her, that it is worse than useless to speak to him. I cannot let you go, I say, without lifting my voice against this shocking plot of which you are the victim."

"What shocking plot, Mrs. Charlton?" asks Captain Dick, taking an easy position against the summer-house, and making himself as comfortable as may be under the circumstances.

"This plot of Dora Lightwood's, which has just ended in your marriage. Is it possible—can it be possible—that you

do not see through it? Do you not know that it was she who told that silly child, Vera, of your accident—that it was she who sent her to Shaddeck Light—that she refused to go in search of her that night, although urged to do so by Mr. Charlton? It was all, with what has followed, a preconcerted plot. And Vera was in it. Silly she is, childish she is, or pretends to be, but she was crafty enough for that. You are a rich man's heir. Charlton is a home to be desired. They both are working girls without a penny, and I say that Vera went to Shaddeck Light that night with the deliberate intention of remaining, and of forcing you to marry her—as you have done."

"And I say," says Dick Ffrench deliberately, "it is a d——d lie."

Her words have poured forth so vehemently, he has been so taken by surprise, that up to this time he has had no chance to speak. But at this she recoils.

"Sir!" she furiously exclaims.

"A lie!" repeats Captain Ffrench, coolly, "a poisonous and foul lie. You will excuse very strong words, Mrs. Charlton. You like them, and use them yourself. Vera Martinez never came to Shaddeck Light with any such purpose, never plotted or wished to marry me. So far as she was concerned, the whole thing was sheer accident. As for her sister—but perhaps it will be as well to leave Miss Lightwood's name out of the question."

Her astonishment and rage are so great, that they keep her for the moment perfectly speechless.

Captain Ffrench eyes her steadily, and goes on.

"Supposing, for argument's sake though, your assertion to be true, is it not a little late in the day, my dear madam, for you to come forward and expose the plotters? I am married now, your revelations will not unmarry me. And if my memory holds good, you were the first and strongest advocate of my immediate marriage that morning at Shad

deck—the only reparation as a man of honor I could make. Why did you not unbosom yourself of all this on that occasion instead? It might have served some purpose then—I confess I am at a loss to see what purpose it is to serve now."

"Sir!" she cries, "is this my thanks——"

"Ladies who expose nefarious plots never require any thanks, do they? Virtue is its own reward, is it not? And before you say any more, permit me to set you right on another essential point. I am not Mr. Charlton's heir. Miss Lightwood has not captured a rich husband for her sister. As to Vera—God bless her—she *is* my wife remember—it is at once my honor and my duty to guard her reputation against slanderous tongues. You will do me the favor not to repeat this very remarkable fabrication again. It is difficult, I know, to refute calumnies, circulated by a lady; still——"

Mrs. Charlton turns from him, baffled, furious.

"It is the *truth!*" she bursts out, "and you know it. Say what you will, Captain Ffrench, it is the truth, and you have been trapped so easily and speedily that the snare was hardly worth the pains Dora Lightwood took. Vera was fond of you; she made no secret of her bold attachment; she followed you like your shadow, or your dog; she was with you early and late; her passion was patent from the first; she went to Shaddeck Light with the fixed resolution of staying and risking all consequences. She is your wife, as you say. Yes, and I wish you joy of your bargain!"

She turns and walks away. Captain Ffrench is alone and watches her out of sight. What is he to do? Knock her down? What a simple and beautiful solution that would be if she were a man; but being a woman—may the demon fly away with her! After all it is a privilege to belong to the unfranchised sex—one can use such fine, strong, nervous

English when one is in a towering rage, and feels so comfortably secure of not getting a pair of black eyes for it.

But where is Vera?

Captain Dick glances about him, takes out his watch, and looks at the hour. It is four. This agreeable conversation has occupied precisely half an hour. In another he must be *en route.* And now he recalls Vera's wistful, wondering face. Poor little soul! he thinks, it is such a shame to visit this chapter of accidents on her head. Whoever is to blame, she at least is guiltless. He feels remorseful—like a brute—as if he had pushed away harshly the timid overtures of a shrinking child. Mrs. Charlton has said she is somewhere in the grounds.

"Vera!" he calls, and, as if in answer, a sob comes from behind him. He turns quickly, parts the leaves; the next instant, with a rush, he is in the summer-house. "Vera!" he cries. "Great Heaven! is it possible?"

He is inexpressibly shocked. For she is here, all in a white heap on the damp floor, the wedding robe irretrievably ruined, huddled together in a strange, distorted attitude of pain. Her arms are on the seat, her head laid on them; she neither moves nor looks up.

"Vera!" he cries, and tries to lift her; "Vera, my pet! my dear little Vera!"

He is like enough the Captain Dick of other days now, but Vera is past all seeing or caring. She writhes away out of his grasp with a strength he wonders at, and only that dry, sobbing sound answers him.

"Vera! Vera!" he repeats, in an agony; "Vera, look up! I did not know—how could I know you were here! Vera, lift up your head! Good Heaven! what am I to say? Vera!"

"Let me be! let me be!" she says, in a smothered voice, and again frees herself. "Go away. Oh! go. Do not speak to me—do not touch me. Only let me be."

"But I cannot. You mustn't stay here. It is damp, and see—you have spoiled your pretty clothes. Vera—do—there is a good child—get up. Look at this mud and mould on your white dress."

"I wish," the stifled voice says, "I had been dead before I ever put it on. Oh! me. Oh! me, what shall I do?"

The choking sobs break from her, in a wild, hysterical way, that completely unmans him. What is he to do? She has heard every word the vile-tongued enemy has uttered.

"Curse her!" he thinks, savagely; "such beldames ought to be shot! Vera!" hopelessly, "*will* you get up; *will* you listen to me? What am I to do if you go on like this?"

He is at his wit's end. Without actual force it is impossible to lift her, and he cannot bear to touch her roughly. He is so sorry for her, and he knows so little what to say. If she were a woman—if she were Dora or Eleanor and could be appealed to rationally—but he is entirely at sea with Vera. He feels like taking her on his knee, and soothing her with caresses and sugar plums. And still she crouches there, all in that disordered white heap, and still the dry muffled sobs torture his ears.

"Vera," he says at last, in desperation, "listen to me. It is after four. In fifteen minutes Dr. Englehart will be ready to depart, and will expect me to go with him. But I cannot leave you like this. If you will not get up, and listen, I will go back to the house for your sister, and my friend must return to the city alone."

He waits for a moment. He has touched the right chord, the sobs cease, and with a great effort she speaks.

"Oh! do not," she says; "do not call Dot. And don't wait, please don't! Only leave me alone—only go!"

"I will never go and leave you like this," he answers resolutely. "Stand up, and let me speak to you, or I will do as I have said."

She rises slowly, shrinking from the hand that helps her. Her head is drooping, her eyes refuse to meet his, she is frightfully pale, and seems to creep within herself as she stands. She is so unlike Vera, bright, laughing, fearless, Vera, that for a moment he cannot speak. He does not try to touch her—with as absolute a deference as he could pay to a queen, he stands before her, and tries to set himself right. It is all Mrs. Charlton's malice and slander; he knows it is utterly false, he will never think of her spiteful words again. Vera must have heard him repudiate all her insinuations—he knows it was purest accident took her that evening to Shaddeck—there is no one in the world he cares for as he cares for her. Everything it is possible to say he says, and says again. Language is, after all, poor and barren; he grows impatient with himself as he talks, almost impatient with her. For she stands just there, so still, so mute, so downcast, not looking at him, not hearing half he says, it may be—that he despairs.

"Vera," he says, "are you listening? Why will you not answer? Why will you not look at me? Why do you stand like this?"

"I am waiting for you to go," she says, wearily; "if *only* you would go!"

He *must* go—some one is calling him, is calling her. The time is up.

"And we must part like this! Vera, say once, once only—you do not blame me?"

"I do not blame you."

"And you do not think I believe that old harridan's abominable lies? Say do you not!"

"I do not."

She repeats her answers like an automaton. If he would only go!

"And you will write to me? You will forget this? Good Heaven! how much I want to say to you, and here is the

last moment! Good-by, good-by! they are coming. Do not let them see you yet."

He crushes both her hands a second, with unconsciously cruel force.

"Dear little Vera, dear little pet, dear little wife, good-by!" he says, and is gone.

Dora and Dr. Englehart stand just without, waiting. Something has gone wrong, they see by his face. No questions are asked. Perhaps Dora guesses; she is pale, and looks frightened.

"Where is Vera?" she asks.

"I have just said good-by," he answers, hurriedly. "Is all ready, Englehart? Good-by, Miss Lightwood." He holds out his hand. "Take good care of Vera."

And then the leave-taking is over, and half dazed, he is being driven rapidly out of the Charlton grounds, and away to the St. Ann's station.

* * * * * * *

Late that night in New York, Captain Ffrench writes a letter. Vera's white face and crushed look haunt him with a presentiment of fear for the future he cannot shake off. The letter begins "My dear little wife," and is as gentle, as tender, as hopeful, as warm as a young husband's first letter should be. It is long, too, and reassures her again and again of his perfect trust, and affection, and confidence in her. He incloses it in a few lines to Mr. Charlton, and feels better for having written it. Poor little Vera! but she will get over the shock in a day or two. Dora will know what to do with her, what to say to her; she will forget it directly, and be all right again. So, when to-morrow comes, and they steam gaily away down the harbor, he has thrown off all presentiments and nervous apprehensions on Vera's account, and leans over the bulwarks, smoking, glad it is over, glad he is off, and hoping—misanthropically enough—he may not see a single woman to speak to until he comes back.

An excursion steamer floats by them, and gives the outward bound three cheers. The little boat is gay with flags and streamers, ladies wave their handkerchiefs from the upper deck, and the band plays. As it chances, the air is "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

Dr. Englehart looks at his friend and laughs.

"Appropriate," he says. "Do you know, Dick, I never said good-by to your little bride, after all."

Dick Ffrench sighs. Poor little Vera! How gay this pleasure-party seems. Yonder is a girl, in a white hat and feather, who looks something like Vera, and see! she is waving her handkerchief, with her laughing black eyes on him. He returns the salute. What is Vera about just now, he wonders, and has she quite got over Mrs. Charlton's brutal attack? And so they steam away, down towards Sandy Hook, in the morning sunshine, to the merry strains of "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE GIRL I LEFT BEHIND ME."

SHE is sitting in a rustic chair down among the peach and plum trees, with idly folded hands, and listless air. Over her head shines the mellow sun of a scented September afternoon; about her blows the soft September breezes; all around her the fruit-trees temptingly stand, laden down with their golden and purple globes. On the grass at her feet lies her hat; near it, on guard, crouches Nero, casting now and then a wondering, reproachful, sleepy glance at his apathetic mistress. Further off, the grass is strewn with windfalls, trophies of last night's storm. But the

windfalls lie ungathered, plums and peaches hang juicy and mellow over her head in vain. Their charm is gone; they tempt her not; lassitude holds her, as she sits here now, with the sunlight sifting through the fluttering leaves overhead—so she has sat for fully an hour; so she has sat for hours and hours, in the long fortnight that is gone.

There are girls, simply and wholesomely brought up, tall and well grown, womanly enough in appearance, who are yet the veriest children in heart; who can enjoy a game of puss in the corner, or blind-man's buff, with as hearty and thorough a zest at sixteen as at six. Vera is one of these—Vera *has* been one of these, but a subtle change has begun—is at work daily, insidiously, and the Vera of two weeks ago is not the Vera of to-day.

So the grapes hang unplucked, the peaches drop uneaten. Nero lies unromped with, and she sits here all the day idle. She is thinking. In all her sixteen years of life she has not thought as much as she has done during the last two weeks. She is thinking for herself. Dora will never be the keeper of her conscience more. The slow change from frolicsome girlhood to thoughtful, earnest womanhood has begun—is far advanced. She has been standing on the hitherward side of Mr. Longfellow's allegorical brook, and a brutal hand has pushed her across years before her time. She has eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and its taste is bitter. She shrinks with terror; she burns with shame; she covers her hot face with her hands, as she recalls Mrs. Charlton's words. To the last day of her life they will ring in her ears, harsh, stern, merciless—*true*—to the last day of her life she will see Richard Ffrench as she saw him then, standing erect and noble, fighting her battles, defending her fair fame. It is so cruelly true—the stab lies there. She *was* fond of him, and thought no more of hiding that fondness than if he had been her brother; she *had* followed him like his shadow, and never knew that it was unmaidenly or wrong, or a thing to be

ashamed of; she *did* go to Shaddeck Light, and remain with him there, with never a thought of what the world might say. She has thought no evil; she knows nothing of the world or its ways—inclosed in a cloister, she could hardly have led a more hidden, a more innocent life. And through that innocent ignorance a great and cruel wrong has been done, that nothing in this world can ever set right. Brave, loyal, chivalrous Captain Dick has married her, caring nothing for her, to stop the wagging world's tongue. Now she knows why he left it to Dora to tell her—why his note from New York held only those four cold lines—why he would not come until the very last moment—why care and trouble darkened his face on his wedding-day. She knows it all—all. He has stood yonder and defended her against her foe—yes, but she can count nothing on that; it is Captain Dick's generous way to fight the battles of the losing side. He may believe it—he *must* believe it. How can it be otherwise, seen as she sees it now? Her conduct from first to last has been such as to make her hate herself for very shame. He has thought her in love with him—not foolishly fond of him, but *in love with him;* he thinks she followed him that night to Shaddeck on purpose to stay—on purpose to make him marry her. Oh! even here by herself, it is too shameful. She covers her face and shrinks from the wistful eyes of the dog. Nothing is, they say, but thinking makes it so. She has brooded over this until not a doubt remains—all that Mrs. Charlton has said he believes; and to save her, and forced by Dora, he has married her, and sacrificed his whole life.

She sits here thinking this, as she has thought it over and over again. She is fast becoming morbid, she avoids her sister, she cannot meet the eyes of Mrs. Charlton, she shrinks from her host. Mrs. Charlton is still here, for Vera has not said one word to Dora of all that has passed. Nothing could mark the change in her more sharply than this. In all her life she has never had a thought, a secret from Dora, but she

has kept her own counsel here. It is partly because she feels she would die of shame to speak of it even to her, partly because she knows her enemy would have to leave Charlton an hour after her revelation.

And Vera is a generous foe. She does not blame the woman much. She has thought it her duty to apprise Captain Dick of the truth, she believes her own story, what does her going or staying signify? So she says nothing, and falls after that first paroxysm of despair, into this abnormal state of listless moping, and wanders away by herself, heedless of book, or work, or dog, or piano, and sits about in damp, green places, at the risk of premature rheumatism, and broods, and broods over her own deadly sins the long, warm days through.

She has received Captain Dick's farewell letter, but she has not read it. She has looked with dreary eyes at the large "Vera," written on the white envelope, and takes it upstairs, and laid it away in her work-box unread. She knows what is in it, or thinks she does. What is the use of going over all that again? She takes off the wedding-ring from her slim third finger, and shuts it up in its pink jeweler's cotton once more. There, in its pristine glitter let it lie, she will not wear it. She never wants to see Captain Dick as long as she lives. He despises her—he has left her, glad to get away, thinking her everything that is forward, and unfeminine, and disgraceful. She will never write to him, never think of him, never care for him, never speak of him, her whole life-long.

Dora sees the dismal change, and tries her best to find out the cause. But Vera is mute. Dora has betrayed her, it is all Dora's doing—she will never trust her again. So Miss Lightwood gives her two or three hearty ratings for her moping fits, and sets it all down to reaction after excitement, and the absence of her idol. It will pass and the child will take no harm. Truth to tell, Miss Lightwood has so much to think of, and see about, these golden September days, that

she has no time to exorcise Vera's blue devils. She is closeted a great deal with Mr. Charlton; there are long, serious conversations in the study, long drives, long letters to write, and to read. "As the bow unto the arrow," so is Theodora Lightwood to the master of Charlton. What is it all about, Vera wonders, aimlessly, and is Dora going back to New York, and when are her studies to begin? Mrs. Charlton wonders too, and more, perhaps, to the purpose. She shows no symptoms of speedy departure, and makes herself remarkably at home in this pleasant country house.

But the second week of September brings a revolution, an upsetting of all things, and the dawn of a new dynasty. All of a sudden Miss Lightwood announces at dinner one day, her intention of going up to New York on the next. Mr. Charlton looks conscious, and lays open the hidden articulations of the turkey he is carving with something less than his usual skill. Mrs. Charlton eyes her foe across the table with a steady, suspicious gaze. Vera looks up with sudden interest.

"Going to New York? Take me, Dot. I should like to go."

Dora glances at her. She is pale and thin, and looks as if she needed a change. Then she turns to Mr. Charlton.

"It will do her good," he says; "I think you will have to take her. I am responsible, you know," with a smile, "for her safe keeping."

"Very well," says Dora. "Pack up this evening, Vera—not all your things, you know—just a dress or two. We will go by the morning train."

By the morning train they go, and Mrs. Charlton is *châtelaine*. But her host keeps out of her way; he spends most of his time in St. Ann's, or about his farms—his avoidance is so pointed, indeed, that she cannot fail to perceive it. Still, as long as she is not absolutely ordered out of the house, in the house she is resolved to stay. Miss Lightwood

is gone just five days when Mr. Charlton follows. This is startling. Dark suspicions, vague hitherto, begin to take real and tangible form, and in less than another week are confirmed.

One morning the New York *Herald* is laid beside her plate, smelling all damp and nasty of printers' ink, and opening it, the first thing her eyes rest on is this :

"CHARLTON—LIGHTWOOD.—On the 12th inst., at the Windsor Hotel, the Honorable ROBERT RUTHERFORD CHARLTON, ex-Governor of Iowa, to THEODORA ELIZABETH LIGHTWOOD, of New York."

Married ! The paper swims before her—she sits and stares blankly at the printed words. Married ! actually married ! That bold-faced little hussy ! that designing little trickster ! that crafty little cat ! She has secured the step-son for her sister, the step-father for herself ! Her worst fears are realized. All has gone to Dora Lightwood—she and Eleanor are nowhere in the race. And it is all Eleanor's fault. Charlton is no longer a place for her ; no house that calls Dora Lightwood mistress can ever for one night afford shelter to her. If she had had any doubt on the subject, a note that comes to her that very afternoon dispels it. It is from the new lady and mistress of Charlton Place, and is an emphatic writ of ejectment.

"The Crescent City will be looking its loveliest this nice September weather," writes gayly the bride. "I know how you hate the North—have I not heard you say so ? Do not sacrifice your comfort any longer by remaining in it. I quite envy you the remainder of this month in your native city. How rejoiced Nelly will be to see you ! Give her our love. At some future time I intend to invite *her* to make a second visit to Charlton. My husband is well, and joins with me in wishing you a pleasant return journey to the South. We go home very soon, and would rather be spared the pain of saying good-by—you understand ? Between relatives parting is so sad ! And just now we are so happy

that we cannot bear to think of even the slightest cloud that will mar our felicity.

"Yours, etc.,

"THEODORA E. LIGHTWOOD CHARLTON."

* * * * * * * * *

October, and late in the month. A golden-gray sky, sunless but bright, lying low over the gray sea. Orange and crimson, the hemlocks and maples stand, gorgeous in their fall dress. Windfalls no longer strew the grounds, peach and plum trees are stripped. Purple bunches of grapes tempt Vera no longer, but Vera is here, bright and brown, and looking pretty well recovered from her post-nuptial despair. Life, after all, is not quite at an end at sixteen and a half, even if one *has* made a dreadful mistake. Mistakes may be mended, one may live and learn, the world is full of pleasant places, and kindly people. She has found this out in her month of travel with Dot and Mr. Charlton, For they have taken her with them; she is no incumbrance, and her dark, silently-pleading eyes are irresistible. She has seen Niagara and the Thousand Isles, and dear old, gray, historic Quebec, and quaint French Montreal, and absolutely forgotten more than once that such a being as Captain Dick Ffrench exists, that she is what Dot calls a "respectable married woman." She wears no ring; she is introduced as Miss Martinez; she insists upon it so passionately that they yield. She wears long dresses, lovely light silks with *trains*, and every one she meets smiles down frankly into the glad, bright, eager, beautiful Southern eyes. It is a happy time, a royal time. Life opens before her in a vista of infinite possibilities.

Dora spends money like a queen. Mr. Charlton dwells in a seventh heaven, and grows young again. He is a handsome old gentlemen at all times; kindly, too, when not crossed; he is proud and fond of his young wife, without making an uxorious fool of himself, and is ready to indulge

Vera in every whim. So they enjoy themselves all through September, and far into yellow October. Now it is the last week of the month, and Vera sits here on the rustic chair alone. Once more Nero lies at her feet, neglected no longer, but patted, and made much of, and conversed with on topics suited to his doggish intellect, for Vera knows how to adapt her conversation to her company. A book is in her hand; she reads quietly, only looking now and then to follow the flight of a bird, or the dizzy boom of a laden bee. Her eyes are bright, a fresh color is in her cheeks, she laughs outright once at something in her book, and it is the sound of this laughter that guides another lady to the spot. A lady in a pretty dinner dress as blue as her eyes, perfumed, jewelled, fair to behold, the Hon. Mrs. R. R. Charlton. She smiles slightly as Vera laughs aloud a second time, a satisfied smile. Dick Ffrench is well away, and his bride is not breaking her heart for his sake, that is sure. But for all that Dora does not quite understand the change in her sister since his departure. In many ways she is completely changed. She never speaks of him—she upon whose tongue the name of Captain Dick was forever. In her brightest moods she darkens, frowns, grows silent, if he is recalled. She refuses to speak of their parting; she refuses to discuss her marriage at all.

She has grown reticent—she holds herself entirely aloof from all gentlemen, with a sort of proud, shrinking shyness. Like Undine on her wedding-day, she seems to have found her soul.

"Your book appears to be amusing, my dear," says Mrs. Charlton. "You will soon have to give up novels, however, and take to the nine parts of speech, and trisyllables. Miss Lansing will be here next week."

Miss Lansing is a very accomplished English governess, engaged in Canada, perfect in music and modern languages. Vera looks up with interest.

"I am glad of that," she says, "very glad. It is time I

began, and I mean to do my best. No one can be more ashamed of her ignorance than I am—no one has more need."

Her voice falters a little, she turns away. Her sister looks at her keenly.

"It is almost time we were hearing from Captain Ffrench," she says, abruptly.

There is no reply.

"Vera, what was in that letter he sent you from New York?"

"I do not know."

"*What!*"

"I do not know. You need not look incredulous—it is true. It is upstairs in my writing-desk. I have never opened it."

"Never opened it! Never opened Dick Ffrench's letter!"

"No. What was the use? I know what is in it—four formal lines. I would rather keep it as it is. Some day I may read it. Dot, you—you have not told Miss Lansing that——"

"That her pupil is married—not likely. And no one here knows except Harriet, and I have given *her* to understand that if she tells tales she goes. It is best so, as next spring you must go to school. Mr. Charlton and I are going abroad in April to remain the whole year, and Charlton is to be transformed. I intend to add a wing there, for a billiard and ball-room—opposite, on the south side, shall be a conservatory. A few more chambers will also be needed. Each year, from September to Christmas, I intend to fill the house with guests, and for the first time in my life enjoy my life. Oh, Vera, they may say what they like, but only the rich *live*. The poor exist, drag out their days somehow, but wealth is the golden key that unlocks the world, and all therein. I think I never knew what it was to be really happy before."

Vera eyes her wistfully.

"And you *are* happy, Dot?"

"As happy as a queen—I can think of no greater happiness than that. I am proud of my husband. I would not exchange him for your Captain Dick, no, nor for any man I ever saw. I am fond of my husband—he is awfully good to me, Vera; he denies me nothing, and he is richer than even I supposed. And I am happy, happy, happy! I would not exchange places with any woman in America."

And Dora meant it. To the full extent of her capacity for happiness, she is happy. How this marriage came about, who is to tell? It is an idea certainly that never of itself would have entered Mr. Charlton's head. But if a young girl, all unknown to herself, gives her heart unasked, and—and all that sort of thing, and if tearful azure eyes, and lovely light hair, and a faltering, broken voice, are brought into play, what is an elderly gentleman, easily fooled and flattered, to do? They are married, and Dora is devoted to him, and means to be a good little wife, and make him happy. She can wind him round her finger, he gives himself up to the siren spell of the enchantress, and never dreams of saying no to his little missis. The gray mare, at Charlton, it is clear from the first, will be the better horse.

"He is late for dinner," says Dora, looking at her watch. "What detains him, I wonder? He said he would return by the four o'clock boat, without fail."

"Where has he gone?"

"To New York, on important business. I may tell you, I suppose—to make his will. It is always a wise precaution. He should have been here two hours ago."

"Some one is coming now," says Vera.

Over the hard white road, and up the long sweep of avenue, a horseman rides—rides, too, at a furious pace.

"It is not my husband," says Dora, "he never gallops like that."

It is not her husband, it is a man from St. Ann's,

dusty, pale, excited. She rises from her seat, and calls to him.

"Do you wish to see me?" she asks. "Have you a message for the house?"

"I want to see Mrs. Charlton," he answers, touching his cap and looking anxious. "If either of you young ladies——"

"*I* am Mrs. Charlton."

He falls back a pace, and is silent. Dora comes up close.

"Something is wrong," she exclaims. "What is it? Speak quickly!"

"Our people sent me," the man says, in a hurried, breathless sort of way; "they are coming as fast as they can. I was to—to break it to you."

"Break what? Be quick, I say!" cries Dora, stamping her foot.

"Miss—ma'am, there's been an accident to the steamer—an explosion—not much of an explosion, but two persons are hurt, and one is—is——"

"Killed!" cries Vera.

"Killed, miss. And I'm sorry to say, miss—ma'am, I mean—that that one is——"

No need to say it. The feet of those who bear him are at his gates. He lies on a door, all stark and ghastly, the dead face covered, who was only this morning a hale and upright gentleman. And Theodora Charlton, six weeks a wife, is a widow.

CHAPTER XXII.

"WHEN DAY IS DONE."

NOVEMBER is here—is here in rain, and wind, and mist. Overhead there is a leaden, low-lying, fast-drifting sky—far away there is a sea, black, tossing, white-capped. The wind has a sighing, banshee sort of shriek as it whistles about the gables, and wrestles with and buffets the trees. The rain patters, patters against the glass; it is chill, too, with a touch of winter in the blast.

Vera stands at her bedroom window and gazes out. It is late in the afternoon, and the house is as still as a tomb. Her eyes wander away from the desolation of rain-beaten landscape to the far sea line. Yonder is Shaddeck Light, nearly blotted out in a whirl of rain and sea-fog. It is tenantless now, even Daddy is no longer there. She turns from it with aversion—if she could only blot it out of her memory, out of existence! How the trees are twisting and tossing about wild, green arms in the fierce embrace of the gale.

> "A wind that shrieks to the window-pane,
> A wind in the chimney moaning."

She quotes dreamily. How wild it must be out there on Shaddeck Bay, among those wicked-looking little white caps! What short work they would make of the Nixie. And what a clean white death it would be, so much better than half what the world dies of—long, loathsome, foul, disease.

Death is in the girl's mind to-day—has been the chief thought in it for six days past. They have buried their dead out of sight, and life goes on without him. It is a desolate

thought—they carry us to the grave, and life goes on without us. Just the same to those who held us most dear—a gap—a missing face and voice for a little, then gently oblivion, and we are forgotten. But it is too soon for forgetting here yet. Vera's mind is full of him. How awfully sudden it all was! Hundreds of railway accidents, of steamboat explosions, happen, and we shudder for a moment, and they pass from our memory; but some time one comes home to us, and stands cruelly apart forever, from all the rest. "In the midst of life——" By land and sea there are disasters. By sea! Does this surging November storm howl out there on the ocean where he is, and is he in danger? A cold, creeping sense of fear comes over her; she has said she never wants to look on his face again—what if she never does?

"Vera, my dear," a voice breaks in, "Mrs. Charlton says she wishes you would go to her. She is in the study, sorting papers, and wants you to help her, I think."

It is Miss Lansing, the governess. Vera turns from the window, relieved to find her dreary train of thought broken up. She descends to what a week ago was the master's study, and finds her sister sitting at a desk, with bundles of letters and papers before her. In her trailing crape and bombazine Dora looks fairer and frailer than ever; on her golden hair is a widow's cap, and her pale blue eyes are faded and washed out with weeping. For Dora has wept real and honest tears of sincere regret. He was so good to her, so fond of her, so fond of her. As much love as her poor little flimsy heart has to give, she has given to the generous gentleman who made her his wife.

His death has been a blow, a bitter blow, softened, it may be—although she will not own it even to herself—by the fact that he has left her everything, absolutely everything. The will has been read, and there is no horde of hungry relations to dispute it, to talk of undue influence, of unsound

mind, etc. It leaves her everything. Mrs. Charlton and Eleanor are not even mentioned; to Vera is left ten thousand dollars. All the rest—a noble inheritance—goes to his beloved wife, Theodora; and at her decease, to his step-son, Richard Caryl Ffrench, should he survive her. Will it be believed? Some latent sense of justice in the little lady herself has been the instigation of this, coupled with the hope that her sister may benefit by it. In her secret heart she is convinced her life is not likely to be a long one—when she goes she cannot take all that gold with her, and has an idea that if what preachers say be true, it might *melt* if she could. This is why Richard Caryl Ffrench, vigorous in strong young manhood, stands a chance of having his own again, when Mrs. Charlton is done with it. She has cast a rapid glance over her future, remote and present. She will not marry again—that to begin with. She is rich and free, and young and pretty; she asks no more of life. To marry again would be madness. She will remain at Charlton with Vera and the governess, this winter, as she originally intended, and go to Europe in the spring. A year or two abroad, and then, with weeds laid aside, and health improved, she can return and make the most of life. She is doomed—that she knows; heart-disease, slow, insidious, but fatally sure, is doing its work. Night will come for her more quickly even than it comes for most, but her day shall be as sunny as she can make it. A little heathen is Dora Charlton, though she goes to church respectably enough, every fine Sunday, and calls herself a miserable sinner, with the best of them. It is probably the truest thing she says the week through; an out and out little pagan she is—Mammon, fashion, dress, pleasure—"these be thy gods, O Israel!"

She turns from her work as Vera enters—Vera, looking long, and slim, and black, in her heavy mourning robe.

"Oh! Vera, child," she says, fretfully, "you must help

me. I grow so tired wading through all these dreary papers and letters, and finding out what to burn and what to keep. I cannot ask Miss Lansing, a stranger, of whom I know nothing. Such quantities of bills and receipts, and old letters —my head is splitting. All the important papers, deeds, mortgages, and that, Mr. Bennet has. But most of this is rubbish—I wonder why people will keep old letters. Here is a compartment of the desk I have not gone through yet—do you take them, and tell me what they are. I want to get through before dark."

She gives Vera her two hands full of papers. The girl takes them, seats herself by a window, and begins her task. Some of the letters are yellow with age—she is vividly interested. Here is a small, flat package from a school-fellow, dated thirty-five years ago, the ink nearly obliterated. Here is a bundle tied with blue ribbon—they are from his wife, from Dick Ffrench's mother. Her color rises, she looks at them a moment, touched and interested, but she does not read them. She takes them over to her sister.

"They are from the first Mrs. Charlton, Dot," she says, and goes quietly back.

But Dot is not sentimental—not in the least. She glances curiously over one or two, then throws the poor little pile into the waste-paper basket. Only a dead woman's letters to a dead man. Why should they cumber the earth, when writer and reader are dust?

Bills, receipts—it is as Dot said, the accumulated rubbish of years. More old letters sere and withered, like autumn leaves. It is darkening fast outside, but she is nearly through—only one letter left now. Not an old one this time; the writing is fresh, and black, and bold. Her heart gives a great leap; she knows that hand. She takes it up with a curious sort of reluctant tenderness, and gently touches with her fingers the large, none too legible chirography. "New York, Aug. 12th:" it was written just before

his marriage. "My Dear Governor"—"Yours affectionately, R. C. Ffrench." And here is her own name—once, twice, four times. Shall she read it—shall she give it to Dot? Surely she has a right to read it. Right or not, she *will* read it, for her eye has caught something that in a second turns the balance. She draws nearer to the waning light, spreads it out, and begins to read.

It is the epistle Richard Ffrench wrote to his step-father, after the receipt of Vera's unique love-letter, and which so angered Mr. Charlton. It has been thrust here out of sight, and this is how it has come to light. If Dora had met it, no harm would have been done; but Fate, with her usual grim sense of humor, has come to the front, taken the matter in her own hands, and here is the result. Alas, and alas! why do we ever write letters? They rise up against us, saying things we never meant to make them say, writing us down asses in the face of the world, for our besotted folly in penning them. Tell your mistress you love her, tell your friend all you have is his, but tell it not in black and white. In courts of law, in public prints, on the jeering tongues of street-gamins, they will stand in judgment against you, and make you out a liar and a fool.

And Vera reads, and reads on:

"The more I think of it the more convinced am I that the sacrifice is at once absurd and unnecessary."——"Overwhelmed by the tears and reproaches of Miss Lightwood."——"Having pledged myself to her sister, at any cost to myself I shall keep my word."——"I feel, when too late to draw back, that this nonsensical marriage is utterly unnecessary."——"To like her as a child is easy enough—to love her as a woman may be impossible."——"I have no more wish to sacrifice my life than other men, but having pledged myself to her sister, at any cost to myself," etc.

She reads it through to the bitter end, begins at the beginning, and reads it through again. Then she sits, her loose

hands on the table, and stares blankly out at the pattering rain.

Dora has retreated to another window, gray squares of light in the rainy evening gloom, still poring over her weary papers. It is only half-past four, but down in the kitchen the gas is flaring; Vera can see it shining out on the wet stones of the yard. She wonders what they are cooking down in that hot, bright place.

How it rains, and how the wind blows! "But having pledged myself to her sister, at any cost to myself I shall keep my word——" Is it as wild and desolate out there on the great black ocean, where his ship is tossing, as it is here to-night? and if there is a wreck, will it matter much that he has sacrificed his life to her, after all?

Right before her hangs a picture; her eyes wander from the storm outside, to the canvas. It is a dreary thing; she has often thought so, and never liked it; she looks at it with an actual sense of pain now. Why will artists paint such gloomy pictures? is there not misery, and suffering, and dreariness enough in the world, without their added mite? It is a twilight scene, in cold grays and pale yellows. There is the sunset line; the last chill red glimmer of light lingers, but rising fast, and blotting it out, there is a dank, white wraith of mist. Bare fields of yellow stubble; a flat wet marsh, two or three dismal pollards and willows—nothing but these, and the low sky line. A broken rail fence, and a woman leaning over it, with folded arms, her melancholy white face turned to that last pallid gleam of sunset. It is mournful; it is hopeless; there is a heart-ache only in looking at it. It is called "When Day is Done." What story of pain and impotent misery is written in that woman's despairing face?—— "Overwhelmed by the tears and reproaches of Miss Lightwood"—— "I feel, when too late to draw back——"

"Vera!" calls Dora, throwing herself back in her chair,

with a tired sigh, "will you never have done? I have finished here. Is there anything worth keeping in that lot?"

"Nothing worth keeping."

As she speaks she folds up the letter, and puts it in her pocket.

"Is that window up?" says Dora, rising and coming towards her. "You are as hoarse as you can be, and—bless the child!—she is as white as a sheet."

"I am cold, I think," Vera answers. She shivers as she speaks, and rises in turn. "Is there anything else, Dot. I—I feel half sick, somehow." She puts her hand to her head, in a lost, forlorn sort of way. "I will go back to my room, and lie down."

"Yes, go; you are as pale as a spirit, or else it is that black dress and this melancholy rainy night. Do not come down to dinner; Harriet shall serve you in your room. Lie down and get to sleep early."

"Yes, Dot—good-night."

"Oh! I will run up and see you presently. There is the dressing-bell, and here is Miss Lansing."

Vera goes slowly upstairs. A fire is burning in the grate, and casting red, cheery lights over the pretty room. She walks over to it, takes out the letter, and lays it on the coals. It crisps, curls, blackens, leaps into a jet of flame, flies up the chimney, and is gone. Then she crosses to her desk, unlocks it, and takes out another, an unopened one this time. "Vera" on the back in the same large free writing—no other name. She looks at it a moment, then deliberately tears it in two, goes back to the fire, and throws in the pieces. In a moment it is gone. But long after the last black fragment has vanished, long after "day is done," long after Harriet lays a temptingly-laden server on the table, she stands there, her hands clasped before her, looking into the ruddy coals, as if reading in them the story of a man's sacrificed and darkened life.

PART SECOND.

"As through the land at eve we went,
And plucked the ripened ears,
We fell out, my wife and I;
Oh we fell out, I know not why,
And kissed again with tears."

CHAPTER I.

VERA.

THE time is summer, the place is London, the scene a room in Langham's. A yellow-gray sky, with now and then a rift of golden sunlight, glimmers above the million roofs; it is a London fine day. The windows of the room stand wide, the curtains are drawn back, all the air and light there are have free play. Under one of the windows, among the cushions of a broad lounge, lies a man, his hands clasped under his head, the smoke from his cigar curling upward, his eyes fixed in dreamy smoker's content on the world outside. The door of the room—a private parlor—stands open, as well as the windows, and a lady, trailing some yards of silken splendor after her along the passage, catches a glimpse of the recumbent figure and smiles to herself. "How cool and comfortable he looks," she thinks; "I believe I must learn to smoke cigarettes," and so passes on, sending a waft of wood violets to greet the nose of the smoker.

The parlor adjoining is the lady's, a very elegant apartment, with a litter of books and flowers, and fancy work that gives it a harmonized and home-like look. The windows here are open too, and she goes over to one of them and stands looking out. She is in carriage costume---pale,

flowing silk, some lace drapery, not to be stigmatized as a shawl, and a bonnet, a Paris marvel, to the uninitiated eye just a knot of creamy point lace and one pale guelder rose; but as to price—fabulous. Her whole array, from the diamonds twinkling in her ears to the dainty, pointed, high-heeled shoes, proclaims lavish wealth and excellent taste. Art, in the shape of a Parisian milliner and mantua-maker, has done much for her; nature has done more. She sets off her dress more than her dress sets off her; you forget the toilet in looking at the wearer, and that is high art. She is tall, she is dark, she is handsome—in these three points there can be no two opinions. The degree of beauty is an open question—something more than handsome the majority call her. She has a pair of eyes such as Murillo or Titian in their day loved to paint, eyes whose lustrous brown beauty might have redeemed from plainness even a plain face. She has a rich abundance of silken dark hair, worn in a thick twist high on a shapely head. Modistes and artists pronounce alike the figure simply perfect; the hand in its pearl-tinted glove, is long and slim; the mouth is sweet and resolute; the complexion clear and colorless as the leaf of a calla. It is the ugly duckling transformed into a swan. It is Vera.

Six times has the earth lain white and dead under the winter snow, six times has it stirred green and living under the summer grass, since you saw her last. You left her at nightfall of a drear November day, you find her at four in the afternoon of a day in June. You left her tall, straight, black, in her mourning frock; you find her tall, graceful, elegant, robed for a drive in the park, in perfumed silks and laces. You left her a sallow, unformed girl of sixteen; you find her a fair and gracious lady of two and twenty. You left her pale and sorrow-stricken at Charlton; you find her in blooming health and buoyant spirits at Langham's. You left her rusticated near the obscure town

of St. Ann's; you find her a brilliant belle, running the round of a brilliant London season, thoroughly enjoying her life, her youth, her position, her pleasures, her beauty. They are two, yet the same—the moping, forlorn little "Mariana," deserted in her Yankee moaten grange, and this gay young lady in her Parisian attire—the same Vera—with a difference.

She takes a low easy-chair, and sits down to wait. The window at which she sits adjoins that at which her masculine neighbor smokes. Now and then an odorous waft greets her. Presently he finishes, and begins to whistle. Then he rises and starts on a constitutional up and down the room, keeping step to his own music. Next he goes to a piano, standing open in a corner, and strikes half a dozen deep chords with a hand that understands the instrument. This seems to inspire him, for it is followed by a ringing Uhlan song, in a fine mellow tenor voice:

"Der Husar,
Trara!
Was ist die Gefahr?
Sein Wein—flink! flink!
Säbel blink! Säbel trink—
Trink Blut! Trara!

Der Husar,
Trara!
Was ist die Gefahr?
Sein herzliebster Klang,
Sein liebgesang,
Schlafgesang. Trara!"

Vera listens, and smiles at first—evidently the gentleman is in fine spirits, and not at all lonely in his solitude. But after the first voice the smile fades, her dark brows contract, she has heard that song before, once before. It seems to her even she has heard that voice. For a moment she is puzzled to recall where—then, with a start, and a thrill, al

most of terror, it flashes upon her. A long lamp-lit drawing-room, a girl in a short dress, and cropped curls, standing by a piano, a man sitting at it, striking a spirited accompaniment, and trolling out this ballad of Nicholaus Lenaun, smiling up at her as he sings. It is so long ago—so long ago, and yet —only six years.

"Der Husar,
Trara !"

He has left the piano, and resumed his quick march up and down. Vera's heart has started beating with a rapidity that it has not pulsed with for the two years of her fashionable life. How plainly the voice comes to her—how like it is ?

"Sein Wein—flink ! flink !
Säbel blink, Säbel trink—
Trink Blut ! Trara !"

She rises quickly, impulsively, and rings the bell. A French maid appears after a moment.

"Félician," her mistress says rapidly, "go and get me a list of all the arrivals at this hotel for the past week. And be quick."

The girl goes. The voice of her musical neighbor has ceased singing, and resumed whistling. Vera's brows are contracted, one dainty foot taps an impatient tattoo.

"If the carriage comes before Félician !" she thinks; "and Dot so hates to be kept waiting."

But the carriage does not come first—Félician enters triumphant with the list. It is a long one, but the young lady's eye glances over it in one flash. It drops from her hand—there it is—the name she has looked for. The voice that sings is the voice that sang for her six years ago the same dashing trooper song.

All is quiet in the next room now, he has gone out and down-stairs. Her sense of hearing has quickened painfully

within the last few minutes; the ringing refrain vibrates in her ears as though it were still sounding:

"Der Husar,
Trara!
Was ist die Gefahr?"

"At last! at last!" she says to herself, "and like this!"

She has known it must come, some time or other, this meeting—with both living it was inevitable. She has wondered often how, and when, and where it might be, and has tried to brace herself to all chances. After all, nothing could be more common-place, less dramatic; they are both here in the same hotel, and his Uhlan song has betrayed him. He is on his way to America perhaps, but that is a very wide guess perhaps; the world is his home, he is of the nomad tribes, a wanderer, an Ishmaelite, a Bohemian, a soldier of fortune. He was wounded when last she heard of him—*from* him she never hears—but that was more than six months ago. He sounds in very excellent health and spirits now at least; a bullet more or less through the lungs does not seem to impair his musical powers. And he is here! Well, the world is full of paper walls, and they hold men and women asunder as surely as though they were of iron and adamant. He does not know they are here, of course; she hopes, drawing her breath quickly, and her cheek flushing—that he may not. She will not lift one finger to let him know. If only Dot does not find out! But that is hopeless; Dot finds out everything. Luckily they go soon, and—— Enter Félician.

"Madame's compliments, mademoiselle, and she is waiting in the carriage."

Vera rises, and sweeps her silk flounces after her over the carpeted corridor. A gentleman is running upstairs at the moment—she draws quickly back to let him pass. He gives her a fleeting glance of grand, careless, surprised admiration,

uncovers, and passes on. It is too rapid, too indirect, for recognition; he has seen only a fair woman, richly robed, making way for him, and forgets her as soon as seen. She goes down and enters the carriage, where her sister already sits, as Félician has intimated. It is Dot, but a faded Dot, a pale, thin, aged Dot, with transparent skin, and sharp cheek-bones, and bistre circles under the blue eyes. There is rouge on the poor wan cheeks, *blanc de perle* on the lost complexion, and a white gauze vail over all. That her dress is elaborate, is costly, is from Worth, goes without saying; the pale gold hair too is profuse—more profuse than ever; Dora is rich and regards not expense. But in spite of false tresses, false bloom, white gauze, and India muslin, Dora will not bear inspection too nearly, or in too strong a light. Her pink silk parasol casts a fictitiously roseate hue over her, but it cannot obliterate the fine lines of care and premature age between her bismuthed eyes.

"How long you have kept me waiting," she says, querulously, "and good gracious! how pale you are. Is it that yellow rose you wear, or is it that you are ill?"

"I am not ill," Vera answers slowly; "it will soon pass. I am never very red, you know. Where is Mr. Fanshawe?"

"*He* keeps me waiting, too—how tiresome everybody is!" still querulously. "Oh! here he is at last."

A gentleman joins them on horseback, an excessively handsome, fair man, with profuse blond beard, a complexion as delicate as that of a miss in her teens, and a pair of light blue, sleepy eyes.

"Not detained you, I hope?" he says, and takes his place at the side of the carriage where Dora sits. But he looks curiously at her sister, a half-smile on his bearded lips. She does not notice him; she is gazing straight before her, with a certain blankness of expression that shows she sees nothing. He pulls a newspaper out of his pocket and leans down to Dora.

"Read that," he says, in a guarded undertone, and points out a paragraph; "do not let Vera see you."

She takes it and glances in some surprise. It is headed "The Cuban League," and is something about a meeting of the "Executive Committee of the Cuban League, held yesterday at the rooms of Dr. Emil Englehart, Langham's Hotel, at which Colonel R. C. Ffrench, formerly on the staff of General Morton, in the Sixth Army Corps, of the late American civil war, was one of the notabilities present. The colonel, it may be mentioned, has recently distinguished himself greatly in 'Cuba Libre,' notably at the capture and destruction of the city of Las Tunas. On that occasion he was severely wounded, and left for dead on the field. His health is now almost entirely restored, and he shortly returns to rejoin the cause of the Ever Faithful Isle. In science, as in war, Col. Ffrench is equally distinguished; he was one of the little band of explorers who, three years ago, returned from the Honduras expedition. His book, 'Among the Silver Mines,' was spoken very highly of among certain readers at the time."

The article is lengthy, but Dora reads no more. She makes no sign, except to frown darkly at the printed page, and hands the paper back to her escort. A glance of intelligence passes between them, then they look at Vera, but Vera still sits abstracted and silent, and notices nothing of this little by-play.

"How long has he been here?" Dora asks at length, in a low voice.

"Three days, and by the oddest chance his rooms adjoin ours. He and this Dr. Englehart are there together. They have a dinner party of the Cuban sympathizers, it seems, to-night. It is impossible but that he and Vera shall meet."

She frowns more deeply, the fine lines between the eyes grave themselves into little furrows.

"It is only a question of time, you know," the gentleman says, lazily. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I must see him," she says, impatiently. "What a bore! And just as I was beginning to enjoy myself. Why couldn't he have died respectably in Cuba when he was about it? People have no business to go about with bullets in them."

"The bullets were extracted, my dear."

"He ought to die—it would be ever so much more convenient every way. And just as Sir Beltran Talbot is growing so particular in his attentions, too! The other men of the expedition caught fevers and died; why couldn't he? Other men were shot at Las Tunas and stayed shot, but this Ffrench——"

The gentleman laughs, still lazily, and shows very white teeth.

"Widow's weeds would be eminently becoming to our pretty Vera, I think myself. I know two or three men who would prefer her in them—if they knew the truth. Would she don weeds and crape, do you think, if this Ffrench really went over to the silent majority?"

"Of course not. How absurd, Dane! After all these years, and nobody knowing a thing of it. What a mistake it was—what a stupid mistake, and no one to blame but myself! I must own that. *He* didn't want to, and she—but she was such a little fool in those days!"

"Was she really?" he says, and glances over at her with interest. "I cannot fancy our stately Vera in that rôle, or any rôle except the dignified, and uplifted, and gracefully self-possessed. She was not always the law unto herself, then, that she is at present? For even you, my angel, must acknowledge that hers is the ruling spirit of our *ménage*. Was she in love with Ffrench in the days when she was a little fool?"

"I don't know. No—yes—she was a child, and a simpleton, I tell you, and did not know the meaning of the word. No, she never was in love with him."

"And yet he is a proper fellow, too, to win a lady's favor

—better-looking now, I think, than even in those days. He is tanned to a fine shade of burnt Sienna—I met him yesterday—and looks every inch a soldier. There is no saying what any of you angelic beings will do in any given case, but it seems to an outside barbarian like myself an easy enough thing for any woman to fall in love with this dark and dashing Free Lance."

"Vera is not of the kind to fall in love at a moment's notice, Mr. Fanshawe!"

"But sooner or later she is bound to do it, you know, and very probably make an idiot of herself for her pains. *You* were not of the kind to fall in love at a moment's notice, my Dora, and yet——"

"I have done it, and made an idiot of myself for my pains!" Dora interrupts with sudden bitterness; "is that what you are trying to say, Mr. Fanshawe?"

"No, my love, it is not," murmurs Mr. Fanshawe, caressing his blond beard; "far be it from me to stigmatize as idiocy what has been the crowning bliss of my life. Sir Beltran Talbot, Guardsman, is an ass, or thereabouts—a good-natured ass, I allow, but still too profoundly asinine to aspire in any case to the hand of our royal sister. Col. Ffrench is a fine fellow, as I remarked before, only unfortunately he is in the same predicament as the immortal 'Peter, pumpkin eater, who had a wife and couldn't keep her.' Joining exploring expeditions and turning soldier of fortune, does not as a rule put money in your purse. And our lovely one is a costly luxury. I should think, now, those ravishing Paris toilets she adorns so well, would cost in round figures some ten thousand dollars a year."

All this *tête-à tête* has been carried on on the off side of the carriage, unnoticed and unheard by Vera. She has her own life apart, her own day-dreams; her thoughts are a sealed book to Dora. Now they are entering the park, and the conversation of necessity ceases. But all through the

slow drive up and down the Lady's Mile, through the bows, and smiles, and greetings—and Dora has made many friends —she is still absorbed in the thought that she must and will see Colonel Ffrench before Vera.

They dine out that day, then follows Covent Garden, afterwards a ball. Royalty is present at the latter; it is one of the most brilliant and exclusive of the season, but still, through it all, Dora keeps that thought uppermost—she must see Richard Ffrench first. She watches her sister closely; she is not so radiant as usual to-night; her face looks pale, her eyes listless, her manner is *distrait;* she avoids Sir Beltran Talbot with a very pronounced avoidance. Dora bites her lip; it is such a pity—such a shame! His "place" in Dorsetshire is a place to dream of; his rent-roll stands first in the baronetage; his infatuation for Miss Martinez is patent to gods and men. Oh, it is too bad! And all because of this Richard Ffrench—this wild, wandering, soldierly, good-for-nothing—— She taps her delicate fan so impatiently that the frail sticks snap. She must see him; there must be some way found out of this muddle. It was all a mistake—she sees that now, when it is too late. Vera might be my Lady Talbot to-morrow if she would. And she does not care for Ffrench—never cared for him in that way. It is such a pity! That nonsensical marriage *must* be set aside.

"You look tired, Vera," she says, some time in the small hours. "Would you not like to go?"

Vera *is* tired; she says it wearily, listlessly; she would very much like to go, if Dot is willing.

Dot is always willing and brisk, when she has mischief on hand. So the carriage is ordered, and under the chill morning stars, they drive home.

"Now go at once to your room, and go to bed," says Dora, kissing her, "and get rid of that fagged face before the garden party at Kew, to-morrow."

Vera smiles, and goes. Dora does not follow her example. She hears voices and laughter in the next parlor, and recalls the dinner-party, of which she has been told. Evidently it has not yet entirely broken up. Prompt decision is one of Dora's virtues—she does not hesitate now. The hour is abnormal, but there is never any time like the present. She takes a card from her card-case, looks at the name, and smiles. The name printed thereon is "Mrs. Dane Fanshawe."

"*That* will tell him nothing," she says; "he does not know, of course."

She takes a blank one, and writes in pencil:

"You have not retired, I know. Will you overlook the hour, and grant me the favor of an interview in my sitting-room?"

"THEODORA LIGHTWOOD.

"I sign the old name, that you may recognize it the more readily."

She rings for Félician, and sends that sleepy damsel to Colonel Ffrench. There is a cessation of the gay voices, and a pause. But she is not kept waiting. The sitting-room door opens, "Colonel Ffrench, madame," announces Félician, and vanishes. And Dora gracefully comes forward, and holds out her mite of a hand, all flashing with jewels, and looks up with the old smile into Dick Ffrench's face.

CHAPTER II.

A LOOK BEHIND.

VERA, obediently enough, goes to her room and to bed, but long after the "sheen of satin, and glimmer of pearls," are laid aside, long after the morning stars wane and set, she lies still and sleepless among the pillows, and thinks.

Six years is a very fair gap in any life ; it is the record of six years she goes over now. They have passed quickly, they look a very brief span, as she recalls them, but they have brought many and great changes, in her inward, even more, perhaps, than her outward life. It is a sufficiently pleasant retrospect, undimmed by any *very* dark shadow, except in those opening days. But that first autumn is a time she will ever remember—it stands apart from all the rest ; graven in pain and cruel shame on her mind.

It changed her, as untroubled years could never have done. Over all there is an indistinctness ; dark days blending into dark nights, wintry winds sobbing about the gables and down the chimneys, sleet and rain, and heavy falls of snow. To all people it was an unusually cold and stormy winter—to Vera the sun never shone once. Always the memory of the words spoken in the garden, of the words written in the letter ! Night after night, lying in the bleak darkness, it all flashes back upon her, and the agony of mortification it brings is known only to Heaven and herself. He thinks of her as a girl shamefully in love with him, running after him everywhere, following him to Shaddeck Light with the determined purpose of remaining, and forcing him to marry her. Oh ! what a shameful, shameful thing ! she sits up in the darkness in an agony that makes her shake from head to foot. He believes all that. She has thought over it so long, and so incessantly, that not a shadow of doubt remains. She feels that she would rather die than ever meet him, that she would fall at his feet only to see the cold contempt of his eyes. Oh ! the shame of it ! the shame of it ! and no human being but herself can ever know how it really was.

She lives two lives in these early days of her trouble—the night life of childish, unreasoning misery and sleepless pain ; the day life when she says lessons, and spends hours at the piano, and in reading French and German with Miss Lair

sing. She grows as thin as a shadow, and Dora begins to knit her brows apprehensively, as she watches her. Dora knows nothing of all this.

What is the matter with the child? Is she still fretting over Dick Ffrench's departure, or is it that she studies too hard? But she studies so easily—she masters every task with avidity; it is a keen delight to her, all this new world of books and learning. Miss Lansing is proud of her pupil.

"She gets on famously," she tells Mrs. Charlton. "Your sister possesses something more than average intelligence—she is highly gifted. She masters music and languages with a readiness and ease I never saw surpassed."

And Dora, ambitious that Vera shall shine in intellect, if not in beauty, does not interrupt. It is only that she grows so fast. Tall already for sixteen, she is shooting up like a young willow, slender, supple, graceful, but woefully hollow-eyed and wan-cheeked.

"She will certainly be plain," Dora says, with a sigh; "she grows thinner and sallower every day, and has no more figure than a broomstick. Well, she is married—after all, it does not so much signify. Dick Ffrench is a bookworm, a *savant*, and—great, blundering simpleton!—no eyes for good looks when he sees them."

Mrs. Charlton has a resentful remembrance of sundry arts, and cunning toilets, and pretty looks thrown away on this blundering Dick, and of a very decided snubbing administered late one night out there on the steps. But Vera likes him, and as the poor thing is going to grow up so painfully plain, it is just as well she is safely out of the matrimonial market.

Mrs. Charlton sweeps her sables a good deal about the streets of New York this first winter, and by no means immolates herself to appease the manes of the late departed. In a quiet way she manages to spend a good deal of the Charlton money, and see considerable company. She has

no idea of making a suttee of herself, or of being buried alive more than three months of the twelve down at Charlton. She is a trifle undecided what to do with Vera in the spring, whether to send her to school or leave her here alone with her governess. For herself, as has been intimated, she intends to go abroad. Miss Lansing decides the point—she is about to be married, and tenders her resignation. The die is cast—Vera goes to school.

In all this time has nothing been heard of or from Captain Dick?

One day, early in February, Mrs. Charlton enters the school-room, a letter in her hand. Vera sits there alone practicing; she has plenty of piano-forte drudgery now. It is late in the afternoon, but what waning light there is falls full on Vera's face. More than ever Dora is struck by its dark pallor, its thinness, and a certain subdued and repressed expression that never used to be there. She sits silently looking at her for a while, until Vera finishes her piece and turns.

"What is it, Dot?" she asks.

Dora holds up the letter, superscription outward, and smiles.

"Do you know that hand?" she says.

The blood flushes up over Vera's face, she catches her breath. Oh! does she not?

"It came this morning," her sister says, "but I have only had time to look at it now. It is for me, you see, but there is an inclosure for you."

She produces it—"Vera" on the white paper, and no other name. Vera looks at it with longing, with wistful pathos, with keenest pain. It brings back so vividly that cruel November afternoon, and all the agony, and humiliation, and shame. She takes it without a word, and puts it in her pocket. She does not mean to read it, she will never read a letter of his again—there never can be anything to

say between them any more—but Dot need not be told that. She knows what he thinks of her—that is enough. What he says here, he does not mean. No doubt he pities her; we mostly have a sort of compassion for what we scorn. No doubt he means to be kind to her, and do his duty by her, and go on sending her kindly letters. But she does not want duty or kindness of that sort. Nothing can alter the past; what is done, is done, but there is no need of her lowering herself still more. She will not read his letters, she will not answer them, she will never think of him if she can help it, she will never see him when he comes back, she will never be his wife. But all that is still a long way ahead, and just at present Dot need not be told. She will be loyal to him, as she feels he will be loyal to her, and no one shall ever say, in her hearing, one word that is not in his praise. With the letter in her pocket, she sits idly strumming on the keys. Dora watches her, quiet amusement in her eyes.

"Are you not going to read that letter?" she asks; "or is it too sacred to be opened in my presence? If it is anything like mine, my dear, you need have no hesitation. Anything more prosaic, or curt, or quietly sarcastic than the congratulations of my step-son-in-law on my marriage, you cannot conceive. Of course he has not yet heard of poor Mr Charlton's death."

Vera says nothing; she plays softly, her eyes on the keys.

"You never told me, by the way," goes on Dora, "what was in that farewell note of his from New York. You had not read it, I remember, weeks and weeks after."

Still Vera says nothing, still she plays on, and avoids her sister's eye.

"How secretive and reserved we are growing all of a sudden!" exclaims Mrs. Charlton, pettishly, yet half laughing. "Don't be a goose, Vera. Read your letter, and see what our dear Dick says. I have a right to know what my

step-son is about, remember. Apropos, though—what shall we do with his letters when you go to school?"

Vera lifts two inquiring eyes.

"You see you are going, of course, as an unmarried girl—as Vera Martinez, (by the by, Captain Ffrench does not do you the honor of putting his name on your letter,) and it will never do for you to receive epistles beginning 'my dear wife,' as I suppose they do begin. What had I better say to him about it?"

"You had better say to him," answers Vera, speaking at last, and speaking with quick decision, "not to write at all."

"*What!*"

"I mean it, Dot; it will be much the best. As you say, the truth would come out if I received letters from him, and —and I could not bear it. I shall have enough to do besides without answering letters. I have nothing worth writing of, either, and—and in every way I shall prefer it."

Her sister sits amazed, and looks at her.

"Vera, do you really mean this?"

"I really and truly mean it."

"You do not want to receive letters from Captain Ffrench?"

"I do not."

"Do you mean to answer this one?"

"No."

"Because," Dora says, "you could explain all that you know. If I write and tell him, he will think it is my doing. Not that I care, for that matter, what he thinks."

"I shall not answer it."

Again silence. Dora sits fairly puzzled.

"Well," she says, getting up at last, "I must say you are very much altered. Something more than I know of has wrought the change; but keep your own secrets, if you like. I think, on the whole, it will be just as well to drop the correspondence until you leave school. By that time both you

and he will be old enough, let us hope, to know your own minds. The more you learn, and the cleverer you are, the better your chance will be of pleasing this scientific husband of yours. I am to write to him then, and tell him you decline any more letters for the next two years—until you have quitted school. What else am I to say to him for you?"

"Nothing else, thanks."

"I shall send him your love, of course?" Dora says, carelessly, going to the door.

"*No!*" Vera exclaims, so sharply and quickly that her sister starts. "No! Remember that, Dot—no sending of love. I send none. I am well, and do not wish to write. Nothing but that."

"Oh, very well," says Mrs. Charlton, shrugging her shoulders, "just as you please. Only my lord will not believe it, you know. You never made any secret before of your open affection for him."

Vera buries her face in her hands. Dora does not intend that last as a Parthian shaft, but it goes home just as surely. Oh! how true it is—how shamefully true! He thinks she is dying for him, no doubt, and sends her this sugar-plum to solace her in her love-lorn misery. But some day or other her turn may come, and if it ever does, he shall see!

Early in May Vera goes to school, a school of her own choosing—an Ursuline convent. Mrs. Charlton sees her safely domiciled with the nuns, and then departs gayly for the other side of the world in company with Mr. and Mrs. Trafton. She has been eight months a widow now, and is looking forward to a speedy shedding of her sable plumes. She has grown tired of the pretty widow's cap, and black, though not unbecoming, is dismal sort of wear. She is looking forward, also, to a right gay time, for the Trafton's have been abroad before, and know many desirable people.

Life is commencing for Dora Charlton at the mature age of seven-and-twenty. And she is not disappointed. She

thoroughly enjoys her new existence as a queen bee, where hitherto she has been a worker.

They spend May and June in London, and make many acquaintances—then they go to Switzerland. Everywhere the fame of the Charlton millions is wafted mysteriously before, and the pretty, *passée* little golden-haired American widow is made much of wherever she goes. It is charming, it is intoxicating, this homage, this flattery, this admiration, this deference she inspires. She spends money like a royal princess—perhaps she is a trifle vulgar in her prodigality—but as she spends it all on herself and her whims, and considering her time of life, and that she has to make up for a dozen wasted years, she is not so greatly to be blamed. To see, to fancy, is to have. The possessions she accumulates would freight a small vessel. Suitors are not lacking—before she has been two years a widow Dora might have been thrice a wife, if she had had a taste for polygamy. But she says no gayly, even though one of the rejected is a German Graf, with two score quartering, a castle on the Rhine, a legion of dead ancestors, and not a penny in his purse.

She has everything her heart desires—money, freedom, admiration—the world is all before her where to choose. Marry! not she. Her wealth will swell the empty coffers of no roly-poly German baron, or needy Italian, or fortune hunting foreigner of any kind. A wealthy young widow is the freest of all created beings. Love! Bah! she is nine-and-twenty and has never felt it; only fools and beggars fall in love. She has never lost an hour's sleep or a single dinner for the sake of any man, and she never will. No man on earth is worth one's freedom. Marry! she laughs at the notion—the old, shrill, eldritch laugh. And still laughing gayly, and saying no to the German, who follows her like a fair-haired, fat shadow, she dances on to Brussels, and there meets Mr. Dane Fanshawe.

CHAPTER III.

"LOVE TOOK UP THE GLASS OF TIME."

SHE meets him in a commonplace way enough, Bradshaw in hand, and eye-glass on nose, one of a crowd of other American sight-seers. He is a Cook's tourist, doing Europe with a lot of other "Cookies," but some bond of union must exist in their souls, for they fraternize at once. Then they meet again at the opera, then at a dinner of the American Legation, then at a ball, where Dora finds out that as a waltzer he is simply one's ideal man. Not that she has ever had an ideal man, but if she had she rather thinks he would have possessed a beautiful blonde beard, handsome, short-sighted blue eyes, a faultless taste in dress, a low, lazy pleasant voice, and be past-master of the art of waltzing. Not a very high ideal, you perceive, but Dora never mounts among the stars, and the virtues, the ball-room gas jets, and the ball-room accomplishments are as high as she can look.

Mr. Dane Fanshawe is a gentleman, whose voice lingers pleasantly in her memory, whose smile she recalls with another smile of sympathy, whose compliments come back to her with a small thrill of satisfied vanity that is quite new in her experience of herself. And why, she wonders? He is handsome, but others are handsomer; he is agreeable, but others have been so before him; he waltzes well, but so did that tall Austrian who was so very attentive only a few months ago Dora is puzzled, but pleased; she is on the edge of the precipice she has laughed at, but the edge is flower-strewn, and the pitfall hidden in roses. Mr. Fanshawe takes no especial pains to please her; it is not his

way to take especial pains about anything; the weather is hot, sight-seeing, galleries, churches, and all that, fatiguing—he has enough to do in six days of Brussels without the added labor of trying to win a lady's favor. He is not half so assiduous as some of the other men; she is rich, she is not bad-looking, but he has heard she has forsworn marriage; and what is the use? He thinks this languidly one day as he watches the devotion of those other men, and meanders by himself with bored patience among the Vandycks and Rubens. Perhaps it is this very indifference, which she sees is thoroughly genuine, that keeps him in her thoughts. It piques her. What business has he to stand yawning there, three yards off, putting up his glass to scrutinize one of Paul Peter's painted women, and heeding no more the other painted woman so near him than the pillar against which he negligently leans? Then they part; the "Cookies" go one way, the party Mrs. Charlton is with another.

It is now close upon the third year of her widowhood and the Traftons have long ago returned to New York. But the world is small, and people come together somehow in the changing revolutions. They meet a second time in Paris, and visit more galleries and churches, and drive in the Bois, and walk through the gardens of the Luxembourg, and dine, and waltz together once more. He *shall* be like the rest, Dora vows; he *shall* feel her power; he shall bow down and do her homage; he shall lay aside that languid Dundreary air, and wake up to the knowledge that she is still a young woman, a pretty woman, a free woman. Of the result to herself she does not stop to think. Paris is pleasant, and both enjoy it; they have a community of tastes—they are kindred souls. They cross in the same ship, and are in common pathetically sea-sick. They walk the deck, they sit in sunny nooks, they compare notes, they learn each other's histories, they run up and down the old threadbare gamut

of flirtation. Then they land, and once more their paths swerve asunder.

"How is it that love comes?
It comes unsought, unsent."

Dora wakes up to the discovery that life without Mr. Dane Fanshawe is a blank. She wakes up to the knowledge, and is thoroughly disgusted. At her time of life, too—she tells the truth to herself—nearly thirty, and he—he is just as languid, just as gracefully indolent, just as Dundrearyish as ever; not one whit, she is positively sure, in love with *her*. Let a woman be never so vain, there is an instinct in these things that tells her the truth if she will but listen. He is poor, too; he owns it with a delightful frankness that characterizes everything he says. He has no prospects, no profession, no ability; he is just a well-looking, well-dressed, well-mannered nonentity, drifting along on a legacy lately left him. But what is all that? She cannot forget him, she misses him exceedingly, there is no one she meets who suits her so well. She is impatient and angry with herself, and plunges into the "vortex" of fashionable life, determined to forget him. But after New Year Mr. Fanshawe reappears on the surface, and plunges into the vortex, too. Not plunges exactly—to do anything violent or muscular is not in Mr. Fanshawe, and the verb "to plunge" implies both He glides in, and floats round and round, in the old pleasant, lazy, aimless way. Naturally they meet often, and it comes to pass that the little victress pulls down her colors and lays them humbly, and yet regretfully, at the feet of the conqueror. Perhaps no one is more honestly surprised than the conqueror himself. He has not done much to bring about this consummation—he is not aware that he has ever desired it very heartily; still—she is *very* rich, and not so old, and not so bad-looking, and—Mr. Fanshawe receives the congratulations of his friends with that calm superiority to all

earthly emotion that sits upon him so naturally and becomingly, wears his blushing honors calmly, and proposes. Before the spring buds are green in this third year of her widowhood, Mrs. Charlton stands pledged to become speedily Mrs. Dane Fanshawe.

And Vera?

All this time Vera has been in her convent, and Dora has not seen her once. But she goes now, and Vera is sent for.

"Wonderfully improved, my dear Mrs. Charlton—wonderfully improved," says the smiling lady superior, "both physically and mentally. Her capacity for study is excellent; her application beyond praise; her deportment in every respect a model of obedience and propriety. Her musical ability is quite out of the common—her voice really remarkable. I think you will find the result of Miss Martinez's three years with us eminently satisfactory."

She does. Vera descends—at least a tall young lady flies down-stairs after a headlong fashion that betokens anything rather than the repose of Vere de Vere—cries out in a laughing, sobbing, delighted cry "Dot!" and flings herself into that lady's arms. It is Vera, but a Vera so changed, so grown, so improved out of all knowledge that Dora gazes at her with eyes of wondering delight. Plain! Why she is almost beautiful. Thin! She is as plump as a partridge. Her complexion has cleared up—from dull sallow it is pale olive; her cropped hair is long and in shining abundance; her waist and shoulders leave nothing to be desired; her hands are slim, white, and taper; her air is self-poised and self-possessed. She can talk easily and well; she has not in the least the manner of a school-girl. She is nineteen now, and is to graduate this commencement. Dora is charmed, is enchanted.

"Why, you pretty child!" she cries; "how you have grown, and how amazingly you have improved. I should never have known you. So womanly, so well rounded, every

bone, and joint, and angle gone! and you *did* so run to bones and angles in the old days," says Dora, plaintively, her head a little on one side.

Vera laughs, the old, joyous, sweet girl's laugh. That, and the Murillo eyes, at least have not changed.

"Ah! do I not know that? How often I have mourned over those same joints and angles! Yes, they have not starved me. My one terror is now that I grow fat. But I banish the thought—that way madness lies. You, too, Dot," gazing at her searchingly, "have changed."

The light of the spring afternoon falls on Dora, on the rich black silk costume and costly India shawl, on the piquant little Paris bonnet, and, alas! on the lost complexion and pearl powder. Dora laughs, but shifts uneasily under that clear, searching gaze.

"Dissipation tells after a while, I suppose," she answers, "and I really have been frightfully dissipated this winter. It excites me, and I don't sleep well, and then—and then I take to chloral, you know, and that is bad. I must go down to Charlton early this year, and be very quiet, and try if I cannot recuperate."

She sighs impatiently, and turns away from the mirror into which she has glanced. The tale it tells is not flattering. Those crow's-feet, those fine sharp lines between the eyes, those silver threads among the gold, the yellow pallor of the skin, the small, transparent hands! Dissipation, excitement, chloral—something is telling on poor Dora. She is growing old fast—awfully, horribly fast. She is but little over thirty; one should have no crow's-feet or white hair at thirty, and yet here they are. To grow old—it is Dora's nightmare, her horror—it turns her small, frail body cold and shivering from head to foot only to think of. She is faded and aged; she has never realized it so appallingly as at this moment, when she looks into her sister's fresh, fair face, with every youthful curve and soft line in first bloom.

"You look a little worn, I think," Vera says, tenderly, pityingly. "You need quiet and a long summer down at Charlton, Dot. And I would give up chloral if I were you. Go to Charlton, drink fresh milk and eat strawberries, drive about the country roads, try sea-bathing, and going to bed at nine o'clock. You will be all right again in July, when I join you—to part no more this time, Dot." She throws her arms about her, and gives her a second hug. "You darling!" she exclaims, "it seems so good to be with you again. Oh, Dot, I *have* missed you—missed you in those last three years."

"So I should hope, dear," laughs Dot, herself again. "What a little wiseacre you grow! 'Drink fresh milk and go to bed at nine o'clock!' Is that the secret of your radiance, I wonder? And so you have missed me a little, in spite of all the ologies and dead and living languages?"

"More than I can say. I used to be frightfully *Dot-sick* the first year, and it never quite wore away. Your long, gossipy letters were such a comfort."

"I thought you expected to have no time for letters?" says Dora, mischievously. "Did you miss any one else, I wonder?"

Vera's color does not rise. Her large, dark, solemn eyes look gravely at her sister.

"Where is Captain Ffrench, Dot?"

"No one seems to know. He and I have not corresponded—oh! for ages. I wrote him, you know, that you did not wish to receive letters from him, and, as I warned you, he did not believe me. I managed to convince him, however; since then I have heard from him no more. He is probably in Central America still."

"Not unless he remained after the expedition. I read in a paper more than a week ago that Dr. Englehart and his band of scientific explorers had returned to New York."

"Indeed!" says Dora, startled. She looks at her sister,

but the pretty seriousness of her face tells nothing. "Have you thought—have you made up your mind——"

"I have made up my mind to one thing," says Vera, throwing back her head with a rather haughty gesture, "that I am nothing to Captain Ffrench, and never can be. Married to him I am—that cannot be undone—but that marriage shall never force me upon a man who clearly enough gave me—you all—to understand from the first that he did not want me. *That* at least has been plain to me for a very long time."

"It is such a pity! After all, it was not necessary, as things turned out. No one need ever have known of that night at Shaddeck—and you were such a young thing—too young to be compromised. I think the marriage was a mistake."

"I think it was a frightful, an irreparable mistake, Dot—a mistake that will utterly spoil two lives. No, not spoil—I shall never let it do that for me, but for him—poor fellow——"

"Ah! you pity him, and we all know to what pity is akin Who knows? it may come all right yet, and you used to be——"

"Oh! Dot, my sister, do not say it—do not ever say that again. I have suffered—I have suffered, I have been fit to die of shame; I am still, when I think of it. To know that I was forced upon him, that he was obliged to marry me; to know how he must have despised me, as half fool, half knave! Dot! Dot! I go wild sometimes! If I could die to give him back his liberty, to undo that day's work, I would die this hour!"

She walks up and down the room, and wrings her hands. Her gray school-dress hangs in straight folds about her, with something of a classic air—her pale face, her wild words, the intense expression of her eyes, give her the look of a tragedy queen. It strikes Dora in that light and she laughs.

"My dear child, if you do it half as well when you graduate, you will bring down the house. You look like Ristori in *Marie Stuart*. It is never of any use regretting anything in that tragic manner; highflown feelings are out of place in the age we live in, and passions, you know, were never made for the drawing-room. We will see what can be done. If you wish it, and he wishes it, and, considering everything, that sort of marriage should not be irrevocable. If he is in New York I will see him, and talk it over. Now I will say good-by until July."

So Dora goes, and returns to the city, and that very night, as it chances, at Wallack's, sees Captain Ffrench. He comes in with some other men, and takes his place in the stalls. Dora leans from her box and gazes at him. How brown and manly he is, how silently and gravely he watches the progress of the play. He has not changed at all, except that three years under a Southern sun have deepened the tints of his already brown skin.

"Who is that tall, distinguished-looking man?" a lady near her asks, and she listens curiously for the answer. "That is Captain Ffrench, of the Honduras Expedition, famously clever fellow. Have you seen his new book, 'Among the Silver Mines?' But you don't read that sort of thing."

So Fame has found him out—has Fortune? But it is not likely; she is much slower of foot than her vapory sister.

Next day Captain Ffrench receives a note from the widow of his step-father. The result is that he presents himself in the middle of the afternoon, and is ushered into her presence. Dora winces a little under the steadfast gaze of those strong gray eyes, and is acutely conscious that she is reddening under her rouge. She flings back her head defiantly—somehow she is always belligerent with this man. It is not exactly a pleasant interview, although a silent one on the gentleman's part. He lets her do pretty nearly all the talk.

ing, sitting toying with a paper-knife, and keeping throughout the same silently grave look that struck her last night. After all he *is* changed, too; that old easy, insouciant dash of former days is gone. It is a very thoughtful, earnest-looking man who sits before her.

"I have just come from Vera," she says, that defiant ring still in her voice; "it is from her I learned that the expedition had returned. She saw it by chance in the newspapers."

"She is well, I trust?" he says, quietly.

"Quite well, thanks, and so grown, and so different from the Vera of three years ago. In every way —in—every—way, Captain Ffrench!" she says, slowly and emphatically.

He looks at her questioningly.

"She was a child then, younger than her years. She is a woman now, and older than her years. She has learned to think for herself. And the result of that knowledge is that the memory of her marriage is spoiling her life."

"I never doubted that the result would be otherwise," he responds, in the same quiet tone.

"It was a mistake, a fatal mistake—I see that now. She did not know what she was about; she regrets it most bitterly. She would give her life—she told me so—to be free."

"I do not doubt it."

"You take it very coolly," Dora says, stung to anger. "Have you nothing more to say than this?"

He recalls that morning at Shaddeck Light, when she stood before him, flashing angry defiance, as she is doing now, and asking him the very same question. A slight smile dawns on his face at the supreme inconsequence of the female mind

"Permit me to remind you, madam, that from first to last I am not to be held responsible in this matter. It was you who insisted it was my duty to marry Vera; it was you who asked her to marry me. Whatever comes of that marriage,

it is you who shall look to it! I positively decline to have the blame shifted on my shoulders. Why you insisted upon it, Heaven only knows. In the light of later events—your marriage"—the strong, steadfast eyes bring the angry blood to her cheeks once more—"I confess I cannot see your motive. I am in no way a desirable *pàrti*. I am a poor man, and likely to remain so. I have no time to make money, if I had the inclination. I lead a wandering life; I have no prospects. No, Mrs. Charlton, I am at a loss to understand your object in insisting, as you did, on this marriage. And, after having insisted upon it, to try to shift the blame of spoiling your sister's life upon me, is a little too much. You made the match, Mrs. Charlton—you must bear the blame."

She sits silent, beating an angry devil's tattoo with her foot, two hot, red spots on her cheeks. What he says is so bluntly, hatefully, uncompromisingly true.

"I should like to see Vera," he suddenly says.

"You cannot see her," Dora answers, angrily, glad to thwart him; "she does not wish to see you. She is still at school, and studying hard to graduate. She refused to write to you from the first—you may infer from that how her sentiments have changed."

"Yes," he says, coolly; "the change is remarkable, indeed."

"You intimate that she was in love with you," Mrs. Charlton goes on, still more angrily; "well, she never was! It was a girl's foolish fancy for the only young man she knew." A sarcastic smile curves Captain Ffrench's mustached mouth. "She was not in love with you, Captain Ffrench, either then or ever."

He rises.

"I have an engagement at five," he says, still with perfect composure. "Is there anything more, Mrs. Charlton?"

"Are you going to remain in New York?" she asks.

"For this month, yes."

"And then?"

An amused look comes into his face.

"Your interest does me honor. Then I go to Cuba."

"To join the war?" she cries, eagerly, "to fight for Cuba?"

"To fight for Cuba. Fighting and engineering are my trades, you know."

Her face clears up. What a short cut this is—how easy a way of severing the Gordian knot. A man goes to the wars, and the chances are five to one against his ever coming back. And to Cuba of all places, where malaria lays more low than Spanish bullets. Climate and bullets he cannot both escape, a beneficent Providence will never permit it. This Ffrench is just the sort of reckless dare-devil to lead forlorn hopes, and storm breaches, and head mad cavalry charges.

Go to Cuba! why it is the very thing of all things she would have desired. Her face lights up so swiftly and brightly that he laughs outright as he turns to go. He reads every thought she thinks.

"Good-by, Mrs. Charlton. Say it to Vera for me, will you, and tell her not to make herself unhappy about the foolish past. A ball, or a fever may end it all, and will be better every way than the divorce court. Once more, adieu."

So he goes, still laughing, but in his secret heart, hurt, sore, impatient. He does not blame Vera—the change was inevitable; only that she should blame *him*, should hate him, is not so easy to bear.

"She was such a dear little soul, too," he thinks, regretfully; "so frank, so true. Why, her very name means true, 'found faithful.' And she has grown up like her sister, no doubt with powder and paint on her face, shallow of soul, and artificial of manner! Yes, Cuban fevers or Spanish bullets are better than that."

July comes, and with it Vera back to Charlton, for the first time since she left it. Green and lovely it lies under the midsummer sun, its roses in bloom, its trees in leaf, its fruits ripening on the laden branches. Dora has changed and enlarged, and improved, but nothing she sees is so much changed as herself. St. Ann's, sleepy as ever, lies blistering in the white heat, the black water slipping about its rotting wharves, and Sunday stillness in its grass-grown streets, as of yore. Yonder is Shaddeck Light. The tide ebbs, and the tide flows, and the little gray cabin stands lonely, and dropping to decay on its wind-beaten, wave-washed rock. Up there is the white church on the hill, with its tall gilt cross flashing in the sun, where she drove one August morning, and Captain Dick put a wedding-ring on her finger—the ring she has never worn. Here is the summer-house where she crouched in her agony of shame, and heard the truth from merciless lips. Here is his room, or the room that used to be his—it is Mr. Dane Fanshawe's now—and the litter of pipes of all sorts, the litter of side-arms and fire-arms of all nations, the litter of books, scientific, mathematical, with here and there a Dickens, or a Thackeray, or an Irving peeping out—have all been swept away to the attic. Only Eleanor Charlton's portrait, oddly enough, remains, the head in crayons, brought from Shaddeck Light. It hangs over the mantel, and smiles with grave sweetness on the slumbers of the man Dot delights to honor. Vera visits the room shortly after her arrival, a muscular chamber-maid playing propriety and making the bed, and looks at it musingly. Poor Nelly, gentle Nelly, patient Nelly, where is she now? When last Vera heard from her she had gone with a family to travel in Europe, and perhaps has not returned. She stands abstractedly gazing at the picture, and, still before it, Mr. Dane Fanshawe finds her, as he unexpectedly appears.

"I thought you had gone with Dot," Vera says, with a

nervous little laugh, and moving away. "Shall I apologize for this intrusion?"

"Not at all—my apartment is honored. I am going with Dot—I mean Mrs. Charlton—but I forgot my gloves. You are looking at that portrait?" he says, suddenly. "You knew her?"

"O, very well—dear, quiet, pretty Eleanor! Is it not a sweet face, Mr. Fanshawe?"

He does not answer at once. He stands and looks at it, and something like a moody shade darkens his face.

"It is very well done," he says, after that pause. "Who was the artist?"

"An amateur, I believe," Vera answers, moving to the door. "Yes, it is very like."

"I wonder why they left it here?"

Something odd in his tone makes her look at him. His face is generally most gracefully blank of all expression, but at present it wears an expression that puzzles Vera.

"Because, I suppose, it seemed to belong here of right. The gentleman who sketched it lodged in this room. If you object to it, Betsy can take it away—*I* should very much like to have it."

"By no means," he says, hastily; "I prefer to see it here. A pretty face, on Bristol board or off, is always a desirable possession. And I like the room as Mrs. Charlton has arranged it."

Vera frowns, and goes. His old manner has quite returned, and she does not like that old manner nor the man himself. He is here with half a dozen other summer guests, but he is here with a difference. She knows all; the marriage is to take place in September, and she is jealous and provoked. The first shock of surprise is over, but she cannot reconcile herself to it. Why need Dot marry? Why can they two not live together all their lives, and be all in all to each other, without any obnoxious husbands coming be-

tween? And if he were the right sort of a man, a manly man, not an idle *vaurien*, caring only for Dot's fortune! Vera has an image in her mind, her "man of men," once and always, and very unlike this languid, handsome dandy. To think of Dot's falling in love with a perfumed coxcomb, with golden locks, parted down the middle, eyes that look half asleep, and an everlasting lassitude and weariness upon him that makes her long to box his ears!

"I wonder if a sound box on the ear *would* rouse him?" she thinks, irritably; "we would both be happier and better if I could administer it. What *can* Dot see in a scented fop like that?"

Dot sees in him not a whit more than there is to see—his thoughts are her thoughts, his world her world, his intellect hers. She idealizes him not at all, but he suits her. And she means to marry him.

"Does he know about the will?" Vera asks one day; "about the estate going to—Captain Ffrench at—your—when you——"

"*No!*" Dora says, sharply. "Why should I tell him? What a fool I was, to be sure, in that, as in the other thing."

"I think he ought to know," Vera says, slowly.

"And why? It is no business of his. I am rich, and I am going to marry him—that is enough for him. Do you think he is marrying me for my money?"

Vera is silent—there are times when truth need not be put in words.

"He is not!" Dora exclaims, irritably; "he is no fortune-hunter. And if he is, it serves him right to—not to know. I shall not tell him. Let him find out for himself."

Mr. Fanshawe does find out, and very quickly, naturally, after the marriage. He makes the discovery during the honey-moon trip, and what he thinks his bride knows not; that expressionless face of his stands him in good stead. He

is too indolent to exercise himself much over the inevitable at any time.

"I must make all the more hay while the sun shines," he thinks, if he thinks at all. "She is rich, and she is my wife now. I do not think she is likely to live long, and after that —well, after that, I shall be able to say at least, 'Come what will, I *have* been blessed.' If she will have luxuries, she must pay for them."

This sounds heartless, put into words, but Mr. Dane Fanshawe is by no means a heartless sort of fellow—not robustly bad indeed, in any way, not unkind, not inattentive, not, for the matter of that, without a sort of liking for the rich widow he has made his wife. That is to say at first, for with time comes change. Dora is exacting, and Dane is not disposed to inconvenience himself to please her. He spends too much money, he stays out too late, he comes home in the small hours, reeking of cigars and wine, he gives champagne suppers, he plays monte and faro, he gambles horribly in fact. He has just one passion outside his intense love of self—gambling. She is not long in finding it out, and money he *will* have. Love spreads his rosy pinions and takes to flight. There are scenes, recriminations, tears, hysterics, in the nuptial chamber. Dora scolds shrilly, passionately; calls him a brute, stamps that tiny foot of hers, and protests she will desert him, will divorce him, hates him, wishes she had been dead before she ever married him. Mr. Fanshawe listens, coolly sometimes, smilingly often, pleasantly always, and when *very* much disguised in—cigars—laughs, a feeble, maudlin laugh, or sits down on the side of the bed and sheds tears, or drops off, in a limp and imbecile way, asleep with his boots on, according to the strength and quantity of the—cigars. But these are the intervals. For months together sometimes things go smoothly, and Mr. Fanshawe is the lazily-graceful, languidly-agreeable gentleman of tourist days, as polite to Dora as though she were some other man's wife.

And through it all Mrs. Fanshawe hides the disgraceful truth from her sister. Vera has always disliked the man and the marriage, and that "I told you so" look is about the most disconcerting any human face can wear. Dora has a profound respect for her stately sister, so sensible always, as sensible indeed as though she were not a pretty woman, and who does not look as though, under any combination of circumstances, late hours, or heady cigars, she could scold, or stamp, or go into hysterics. She is very much admired in Washington society, that first winter; has a number of admirers, and one offer. They go to Europe in the spring—Vera is a good American, but she feels she must see Paris *before* she dies—must see Venice, Naples, Vienna, Rome—most of all Rome. It is the dream of her life, and Dora indulges her. Dora indulges her in all things; that old sisterly love, the one pure, unselfish thing in Dora's meagre, selfish life, is stronger than ever. It rests and comforts her to come to Vera after one of these stormy scenes with her indifferent husband. Her health is failing, too, she needs travel and change; the heart trouble of her youth is more troublesome than ever. So they go, and Vera, happier than most of us, has the desire of her heart, and does not find it turn to dust and ashes in her mouth. Paris, Venice, Rome, she sees them all—she grows brighter, healthier, handsomer, every day. If the memory of the man to whom she is married ever crosses her thoughts Dora does not know it. She never speaks of him. But taking up a home paper one day she reads there of the capture of Las Tunas, and among the list of mortally wounded is the name of Captain Richard Ffrench. He had fought like a lion, and had fallen with a bullet through the heart.

There is a grand ball to be that night, and a superb toilet has come home for Vera, but she does not wear it, does not go. She is deadly pale when Dora meets her next, but if she suffers she makes little sign. She goes on with her life just the same, and hides her heart jealously from all the

world. But the next mail contradicts the report—it is not death, only a bad wound—a ball through the lung, not the heart. Richard Ffrench is not dead, or going to die. Dora watches her with great interest and curiosity, but is baffled Dying or living, they can hardly be more asunder than they are; but why did he not die? It would be so much more comfortable every way!

In the spring of the second year they return to London, intending to remain until July, and then go home. And this June night—morning rather—Dora Fanshawe stands smiling under the chandelier, and holding out one diamond-ringed hand to Colonel Richard Caryl Ffrench.

CHAPTER IV.

AT DAWN OF DAY.

SHE comes trailing her rich dress over the carpet, and holding out her jewelled hand "in her lovely silken murmur, like an angel clad with wings," he thinks, some misty memory of his Browning reading in the old Eleanor Charlton days, returning to him. Only after all, Dot is not the sort of little woman in any attire to suggest angelic metaphor—rather she is like an opera fairy in that shining pink silk, and all those milky pearl ornaments. He wonders as he looks at her—such ripples and ringlets, and twists and puffs of fluffy gold hair! On whose head did it all grow? Such glimmering small shoulders, half vailed in frosty lace; such a dazzling small face, all snow-white and rose-red; such gleaming blue eyes, and such a thin, thin little hand. He could span the fragile fairy with one hand, it seems to him—such an old fairy, too, when one is near.

Out of his dark, wondering eyes a sudden compassion looks Poor little Dot! It is a hard life, this treadmill of fashion, and it is telling on her. And is Vera a younger copy of this, he wonders, as he holds for a second those tiny, ringed fingers, and if so what a pity, what a pity!

For Dora, she looks upon the stately figure of a tall officer in undress uniform—it has been in order, it seems, to be semi-military to-night; she looks at the "burnt sienna" complexion, the dark, resolute eyes—but from the fixed gaze of these latter rather shrinks. They give her, they always *did* give her, an uncomfortable sense of being transparent as clear glass to this man; they seem to look straight through the pink and white so artistically laid on, and read the empty heart, the hard little soul below. He disconcerts her before he has opened his lips, but she laughs gayly, and greets him after the airy fashion he remembers so well.

"Ever so many apologies for interrupting your gay party, and at this hour. How surprised you must have been at receiving my card. And at three in the morning! As if it were a matter of life and death. But you know how impulsive I always was, and I grow worse every day. And really, I wanted to see you so much. Take a seat."

She waves him gracefully to a chair, and sinks into another, the pink silk dropping into flowing folds, and the point of a tiny kidded foot peeping out effectively.

"Let me see—it is two, yes, three years, actually three, since I saw you last. You do not change much with the revolving seasons, Captain—I beg your pardon—Colonel Ffrench. We read all about that, you know—your bravery, and your wounds, and your promotion. Ah! how terrible it was—the wounds I mean. Report said you were dead. And then, again, we read of your being surrounded, and captured, after prodigies of valor, and sent a prisoner to the Moro. And how once you were sentenced to be shot at daybreak, and only were rescued at the eleventh hour. We

know all about you, you see ; we have followed you through all your deeds of 'derring do.' What a charmed life you must bear, Colonel Ffrench."

He smiles ever so slightly. She runs on so rapidly that she gives him no time to speak, even if he were so inclined.

"I only found you out this afternoon through a paragraph in the *Times*," she continues. "How long is it since you came to London ?"

"Three days."

"Did you know we were here ? But of course you did not. Do you remain long in England ?"

"That is uncertain."

His curt replies are in contrast to her easy volubility, but they do not disconcert her. She has got over her first awkwardness, and is quite herself once more.

"You return to Cuba, I suppose ? Ah ! you fire-eaters are never satisfied away from the field of glory. And how about that shot through the lungs ? Quite convalescent, are you not ? So far as appearances go, I think I never saw you looking better."

It is a compliment he feels he cannot honestly return. Certainly those steadfast eyes of the Cuban colonel see more than Mrs. Fanshawe intends they shall see—paint, powder, perfume, penciled brows, darkened eyes, false hair, false shape, false tongue, false heart—he sees all. And Vera is like this—poor little Vera !

"You did not know we were here—how could you ? Our names would tell you nothing. To think you should be our very next door neighbor ! how odd. Did you visit New York before crossing over ?"

"I did not."

It is as hard to extort an answer from him as though he were in a witness-box, and she the counsel for the other side But she will make him speak before she is done with him.

"Then you have not heard of my marriage?"

She smiles with perfect ease as she says it, and plays coquettishly with her fan. He looks at her, but not in surprise.

"Your marriage, Mrs. Charlton——"

"Ah!" Dora laughs. "I knew you had not. Mrs. Fanshawe, please—Mrs. Dane Fanshawe. It is nearly two years ago now, and we were married in New York. I sent you cards, but of course you did not get your mails regularly, out there among all that fighting. It is late in the day for congratulations, but they never come amiss."

"You have my best wishes for your happiness, Mrs. Fanshawe."

"Almost immediately after our marriage we came abroad, and have been travelling ever since. We are merely stopping here for a few weeks of the season, and—and because we cannot induce Vera to leave."

Her name has been spoken at last. But Colonel Ffrench takes it very calmly. He does not speak—he sits quietly, and a little coldly, waiting for what is to come. He has always distrusted this woman; he distrusts her more than ever to-night.

"Vera is with us, of course, and—need I say it?—it is entirely on her account that I have asked for this interview. Living in the same hotel, it is quite impossible but that you and she shall speedily meet. And before that meeting takes place, for her sake, for your own, it is best I should speak to you."

She is warming to her work. He is not a very promising looking subject, as he sits there with that impassive countenance, but Dora's faith in herself and her strategic abilities is boundless. She is one of the class to whom all success is possible, because they believe in themselves. She is resolved, by fair means or foul, to give Vera back her freedom. If sisterly tact, and a few sisterly lies, can do it, she is resolved

that Vera shall be Lady Talbot. This man is the only obstacle in the way, and this man, though he were twice as big, and brown, and determined-looking, shall soon be an obstacle removed.

"Colonel Ffrench," she says, leaning a little forward, and tapping emphatically with her fan, "six years ago a great mistake was made, one that I have never ceased to regret. The fault was mine, I freely admit that. All the same, it was a horrible mistake, but I trust not an irreparable one."

She pauses, but the calm, attentive face before her is impassive as a handsome mask. What she has said needs no reply, and receives none.

"From the day of that marriage Vera changed—from a frolicsome, heedless child she became silent, dispirited, almost moody. She had fancied you in a wild, childish fashion, as little girls almost always do fancy young men. She consented heedlessly to the marriage, and the moment it was over repented of it. That repentance has deepened with every passing year. She refused to write to you, though I urged her to do so; she refused to see you on your return from Honduras; she has never—no, not once—spoken your name voluntarily in my hearing since that time. Unjust to you this undoubtedly is, but women do not reason, you know, they act from their feelings. And Vera's feelings, so far as you are concerned, and so far as I can read them, for she is sensitively secret on this point, have undergone a total revulsion. From a girl's foolish fancy they have changed to a woman's unreasoning aversion. Pardon the word, but the truth is always best."

The shadow of a smile dawns and fades on the soldierly face. Truth from the lips of this glib little liar! Slight as it is, Dora's quick eyes catch it, and she bristles up defiantly at once. She sits very erect, her gleaming blue eyes flashing upon him.

"Pardon me, Colonel Ffrench, do you doubt what I tell you? If so——"

"Pray go on, Mrs. Charl—, excuse me, Mrs. Fanshawe. Why should I doubt it? it is perfectly natural, and precisely what was to be expected. So Vera detests me. Ah! I am sorry for that."

"Detest is perhaps too strong a word; her liking changed to dislike, to intense annoyance at finding herself bound, *bon gre mal gre*, to a man she did not care for. But it is only of late——"

Dora breaks off in pretty embarrassment—the subject is evidently growing delicate. Colonel Ffrench watches her, and despite his seriousness, there is an unmistakable gleam of amusement in his eyes. The farce is well played, but what a farce it is!

"I scarcely know how to go on," pursues Dora, that kittenish confusion still upon her, "the subject is so—is so—— Colonel Ffrench, you must not blame my sister too much; remember, our feelings are not under our control 'to love or not to love.' And Vera is so young, so attractive, so——"

"Pray do not distress yourself to find excuses. Mrs. Fanshawe," says Colonel Ffrench coolly. "My wife has fallen in love with another man—that is what you wish me to understand, I think?"

She laughs a short, uneasy, angry laugh.

"You put it in plain English at least; but that was always one of your virtues, I remember. Yes, Colonel Ffrench, unconsciously to herself, with pain, with remorse, with fear for the future, Vera's heart has gone from her—her woman's heart, for the first time."

"Let us hope at least it has gone into worthy keeping. Might one ask the name of one's favored rival?"

"Presently—all that in time. Would that every husband were as amenable to reason as you, my dear colonel! But, then, every husband does not marry and desert his bride

under the same exceptional circumstances. She has given her love to one in every way worthy the gift, to one who centres in himself high rank, great wealth, ancient lineage, talent, and title."

"Title!" interrupts Richard Ffrench, and smiles. "You rank the gentleman's perfections in the order of ecclesiastical processions, I see—the greatest comes last."

"And," goes on Mrs. Fanshawe, the angry glitter deepening in her eyes, "to one who loves her truly, deeply, greatly. There is but one obstacle to their perfect happiness, and that——"

"A by no means uncommon one, I believe, in those uplifted circles—an obnoxious husband. All this time, my dear madam, I sit in ignorance of the name of this paragon—this rich, highly born, highly bred, titled gentleman who aspires to the hand—no—the heart, of the lady at present my wife."

"To both hand and heart, Colonel Ffrench, with your permission. The gentleman is Sir Beltram Talbot, Baronet; his devotion to my sister has been from the first the talk of the town."

"Ah! and she returns this very ardent devotion, you tell me? And I am in the way. But to so clever a lady as yourself, Mrs. Fanshawe, what does an obstacle more or less signify? I am in your hands. What am I to do? You made this match—how do you propose to unmake it?"

"Sir, if you treat this subject as a jest——"

"Not at all; I am profoundly in earnest. Far be it from me to show unseemly levity where the happiness of a young, rich, and titled heart is concerned! And Vera's welfare—for old time's sake—is necessarily dear to me. I merely ask for information."

"There is such a thing as divorce," begins Dora, but she has the grace to redden under her rouge; "the marriage was so exceptional, and—and considering everything—the

years of your absence—*desertion*, perhaps, we might call it——"

"It will be the better word certainly," he says, with gravity, "for a divorce court. .Pardon me—is this your idea, Mrs. Fanshawe, or Vera's?"

"Vera has grown up with some very strange ideas," returns Dora, with acerbity; "caught from her Ursuline nuns, I suppose. It is *not* Vera's. She has notions of duty, and the sanctity of the marriage tie, and all that—romantic and nonsensical! It was a mistake to shut her up for three years in a convent; I cannot imagine where else she can have acquired them."

"It is indeed singular, and with the benefit since of your excellent training, too. On the whole, though, it is a relief to hear she has those romantic and nonsensical ideas. They are old-fashioned, I am aware, and almost obsolete in fashionable life; but I am such an old-fashioned fellow myself, that I believe I prefer them. Still, no doubt you can talk her into a more advanced and practical frame of mind before long."

"I shall certainly do my best," says Dora, with dignity. "She shall not sacrifice her life for a sentiment. As the wife of Sir Beltram Talbot she will be a perfectly happy woman; as your wife—*what* will she be, Colonel Ffrench? A poor woman, an unloved wife, an unloving wife, a widow during the best years of her life, in the abnormal and doubtful position a woman always holds who is separated from her husband. Yet such are the notions she has imbibed that I am positive if you went to her to-morrow and claimed her as your wife she would go with you. Such are her stringent ideas of duty that she would go with you loyally though it broke her heart. But will you demand this sacrifice, Richard Ffrench?"

He is grave enough now; the amused gleam has left his eyes, the sarcastic curl his lips.

"God forbid!" he answers; "I demand no sacrifice. Vera was my little friend once—she shall never break her heart by act of mine. If she can get her freedom, let her get it. If she can marry Sir Beltram Talbot, let her marry him. But—I hope she will not!"

"You hope she will not!"

"From the bottom of my heart. I, too, Mrs. Fanshawe, am one of the sentimentalists who believe in the sanctity of marriage. I made your sister my wife—if I gave her little love, I have given her at least perfect and unbroken fidelity, in thought and deed. That she has not done the same is a fact that, though it may grieve, does not surprise me, and for which I cannot greatly blame her. All things considered, it is, though wrong, natural. If she is capable of seeking a divorce, I shall not lift a finger to prevent it; if she is capable of marrying Sir Beltram Talbot, she is certainly not fitted to be wife of mine. But I say again, I hope she will not."

"If you mean to tell her this when you see her," says Dora, angrily "we may as well end the matter at once. That 'I hope she will not' will turn the scale. She will not."

"I shall not try to influence her," he says, coldly; "no word of mine shall turn the scale. But on what ground shall you apply for your divorce?"

"On the ground of desertion—it is sufficient," says Dora, her resolute little face hardening; "there are States in which it is amply sufficient. It will be necessary for her to return to America, of course, and if you do not defend the suit——"

She pauses; in spite of her hardihood she winces under the chill contempt of his eyes.

"There need be no publicity unless you make it," she begins again, rapidly; "no one in England need ever know, Sir Beltram need not know——"

She breaks off again. She is enraged with herself for her weakness. Down to the depths of her vapid soul he is making her blush. He breaks the pause.

"And Vera will marry any man like this! Well! she is changed of course, but what a change it is! She used to be true as truth, brave, honest, pure. Mrs. Fanshawe, I am going to ask you a question, and I want you to answer it—*why* did you insist on my marrying your sister?"

"You were told at the time—to condone, to repair her imprudence in staying with you that night at Shaddeck Light. Why do you ask again?"

"Because I no more believe that than you do. Just at first, assailed by you, by Mrs. Charlton, by my step-father, I did for a little accept the idea. But a few days' reflection convinced me of its absurdity, I thought at the time that I knew your motive, but since you became mistress of Charlton I confess I am all at sea. Possessing the Charlton fortune, you had absolutely nothing to gain from the preposterous marriage you so strenuously insisted on."

"Shall I tell you, then?" says Dora, and flings back her head. A sort of reckless, defiant audacity flashes out of the blue eyes. She knows it is absolutely impossible for him to think worse of her than he does, and her very dislike of him spurs her on to outrage the last remnant of his good opinion. "I will. Listen!" She leans forward, a fine smile on her thin lips. "When I first came to Charlton, it was with the deliberate purpose of marrying *you*. I tell you this, for your vanity will not be elated; you personally I never liked, but I did like the heir of Charlton. I very soon saw what love you had to give—and it never was worth much—was given to Eleanor Charlton. But she refused you—she had another lover, you know, whom she met by stealth in the grounds after night, and then a new hope dawned. You and Vera were fast friends, but you only cared for her as a little girl who amused you, and the hope was not a

strong one. Then came that night at Shaddeck, and the way was made easy. I knew you had Quixotic notions of honor and all that, and simply worked on them. Mrs. Charlton abetted me through sheer malevolence, and—you married Vera. My motive was to remain at Charlton; as the sister of its mistress I could do so. If you had remained at home, instead of running off on that wild-goose chase to Central America, a sister of its mistress I would be to this day, and no more. Mr. Charlton would never have married me had you not forsaken him, but you did forsake him, and —never mind why—he married me. How could I foretell you would go—how could I forecast he would make me his wife and heiress? Could I, rest assured you would never have been troubled with all that talk and tears, and Vera would still be free. But I acted for the best—I never was among the prophets. As it is, I regret my mistake, and will do all I can to set it right. It will be best for you, as well as Vera, to get your freedom back—some day I presume even you may marry again. There! for once I have told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

He rises. Of the profound disgust he feels his face tells nothing, but he must go, or stifle. Is it the heavy pastilles that perfume the room, or odor of ess. bouquet that hangs about her, or the unwomanly confession she has made, that suffocates him?

"Are you going? You will say nothing of this to Vera should you meet. She does not wish to meet you, remember that, but if you ask for an interview she will grant it. On the whole, perhaps, it will be better *not* to ask for it."

He replies nothing, but turns to the door. Dora rises in turn, and follows.

"You will not interfere, then, in the matter of the divorce?" anxiously.

"I have said so."

"And you will make no claim upon her? Influence her in no way at all?"

"In no way at all."

"We go into lodgings to-morrow," Mrs. Fanshawe continues. "Perhaps, after all, she may never know you are here. It would be so much better. Very many thanks for granting me this interview, and your generous renunciation of all claims. But generosity was always one of your most striking traits, I remember."

"Good-morning, Mrs. Fanshawe."

"Good-morning, Colonel Ffrench. What! will you not shake hands? *Should* you meet Vera, remember all this is strictly *entre nous*. Good-morning, and good-by."

He escapes at last, and makes his way down-stairs and out, to where a clammy morning fog wraps the world, and a sky like drab paper hangs dismally over London. It is dawn, a dawn of mist and darkness and coming rain, but it is fresher, purer, clearer than the sweet, fetid atmosphere he has been breathing. He lights a cigar to clear away the vapors, and help him to see daylight.

"In love with Sir Beltram Talbot, and married to me. Wooed by a baronet, and wedded to a penniless soldier of fortune. A woman without womanly truth, or delicacy, or honor. *Ay de mi!* my poor little Vera, it is hard lines for you."

CHAPTER V.

A SUMMER AFTERNOON.

THE threatening rain is but a threat. When Mrs. Fanshawe opens her eyes on this mortal life, the sun is slanting in long golden bars through the closed Venetians. It is high noon, Mrs. Fanshawe's usual time for rising. It was four this morning when she went to bed; it is almost always four when she goes to bed, and even at that hour, and even with the aid of a chloral punch, slumber does not always come. For she has her worries, this poor little Dora; she is troubled and anxious about many things, more so perhaps than in the old days, faint as a dream now, in the show-rooms in New York. There is her husband—her brows contract always when she thinks of him, and the fine lines she hates to see deepen. There is her health—in the garish morning light you may see that the fair, blonde skin is growing dull and sallow, you may see sharp little cheek bones, and dark-circled, deep-sunken blue eyes. Dora, who half a dozen years ago never shrunk from the brightest, most searching sunshine, shrinks from it now with absolute terror—it is always truest kindness to place half the room between yourself and her when you talk. There is Vera and her future which *she* has marred, but not irretrievably marred it may be. With a little judicious weaving of the web, a little judicious talk with her sister, a few insidious hints thrown out, her womanly pride aroused, all may yet be well. Latent in Dora's mind is the unpleasant conviction that Vera the woman cares as much, cares more for Richard Ffrench than Vera the child. From first to last he has been her hero, and now that he is her husband—and exactly the sort of man a

girl of Vera's stamp is most certain to admire—why, her task will be no child's play. In all these years it has been the rarest of rare things for Vera to speak of him, and no symptom could be more dangerous—it shows he has never been out of her thoughts, and is too tender, too sacred a subject to be profaned by words. Now he is here, and they will meet, and with the child's sentimental ideas of wifely love and duty, too—and Sir Beltram's place down there in the green heart of rustic England is more like one's dream of paradise than an every-day baronet's country seat, and his magnificent rent-roll—so old a family, too, every one knows the pedigree of a Talbot—and his passion for Vera is the talk of the town. All London considers it a settled thing. And to think—to think a foolish act of *hers* should stand in the way of all that. It is true she did it for the best—how was she to foretell that Mr. Charlton would marry her, and be so easily influenced in the matter of the will? To-day Richard Ffrench is without fortune or home to offer his wife—a name he has, it is true; but what is in a name? It is her duty—Dora sees it clearly, sitting under the hands of her maid—her sisterly duty to undo what she has done. She warms to her work as she thinks of it, its very difficulties stimulate her—a little skilful manœuvring, a few clever little fictions, with just the least grain of truth for groundwork in her ear, and the thing is done. Vera is proud—is acutely, is morbidly sensitive about her marriage, and would die sooner than let him know she still cared for him. It is the only thing she can count upon—that pride; she will work on it, and he has promised not to interfere. She so seldom fails in anything she resolutely sets her heart on—she will not fail now. There will be that quiet divorce in some out-of-the-way State, no scandal, no publicity. Or perhaps Ffrench may return to Cuba, and there are always the chances of war—no man can carry a charmed life forever. It would be even better, as he himself said, than the divorce. Dora has no idea of being blood-thirsty at all, but she sits

and calmly counts the possibilities of Richard Ffrench being shot over there—sighs for it indeed while Félician does her hair. It would simplify matters so! And then there would be a marriage with which New York would ring, and next year, a tall, dark-eyed, Spanish-looking Lady Talbot would be presented at court——

"A note for madame," says Félician, answering a tap at the door, and Dora's dream of the future fades out suddenly, and she comes back with a start to the present. The note is in her husband's hand and is a careless line to say he is not to be expected to do escort duty that afternoon. He is going with a party of Americans—old friends of his—nobody his wife would care about—to Hampton Court, and he is hers, D. F.

A frown knits together Mrs. Fanshawe's forehead. It is a common enough thing—it is altogether too common a thing for Mr. Dane Fanshawe to absent himself at the last moment from dancing attendance on his wife and sister-in-law. A party of Americans to Hampton Court! She crushes the note viciously and flings it from her; she does not believe one word of it. Innocent sight-seeing is not much in Dane Fanshawe's line—it is so likely he will spend all this long, warm afternoon staring at the dim old court beauties, hanging there in the dreary palace rooms. His wife knows better, and she forgets her sister, and her plottings, and her eyes flash fire. Every day he neglects her more and more, and his marked attentions in other quarters—does she not see it all? Last night he left her at the opera, and has not since returned. Hampton Court indeed! Dora knows better, and a passion of impotent, jealous wrath sweeps through her. As if gambling were not bad enough, but that this last insult must be offered! Neglecting the wife to whom he owes everything, and devoting himself to the wives of other men! A fool she may have shown herself in her sister's marriage, but not half so great a fool as in her own.

"Freedom—men's homage—happiness—what did I see in him to resign all that for his sake?" she thinks, bitterly. "Truly, while I am about the divorce business it might be as well to seek for two. It will come to it some day. His gambling debts I will not pay, his insolent neglect I will not bear. Let him look to it, if he tries me too far!"

Her maid brings her breakfast—chocolate, a roll, and a little bird. Mrs. Fanshawe has no appetite; that is why, perhaps, she grows so fearfully thin. All the art of dress and corset maker is required to hide it, and even made up with the best skill of these artists, and an accomplished Paris maid, used to making the most of very little, it is a small, fragile-looking creature she sees in the mirror. She grows worn and old—a shudder creeps all over her small body as she realizes it. It never comes home to her so sharply as when she stands beside Vera, so fresh, so strong, so full of life, so beautiful in her young vitality. That reminds her—where is Vera? Her good-morning kiss generally awakes Dora from her feverish forenoon slumbers, but it is now one and she has not appeared. She glances languidly at Félician and inquires.

"*Mais*, madame. Mademoiselle Vera departed more than two hours ago with the groom, for her morning canter in the park, and has not yet returned."

This is nothing new, and Dora thinks no more about it. But something new has occurred during that morning canter along the road after all. As she sweeps along, her servant behind her, glancing carelessly at the faces along the railing, Vera suddenly sees one that sends the blood with a cold, startled rush to her heart. It is the face of a tall, sunburned, soldierly man, leaning lightly against the rail, and talking with two or three others.

Their eyes meet—in his, surprised admiration, but no recognition; in hers—but those brilliant eyes keep their owner's secrets well. One of the men lifts his hat as she flashes by and looks after her with a smile.

"The handsomest woman in London," he says. "In all your wanderings, under Oriental and Occidental suns, Colonel Ffrench, you must have seen some beautiful faces. Have you ever seen fairer than that?"

"She is a pretty woman, and she rides well," is the Cuban colonel's careless answer, "and much more like a Spanish Doña than one of your fair countrywomen."

"She is not my countrywoman; she is yours, I fancy. Well, and how did you manage to give your guerrillas the slip, colonel? It must have been an uncommonly close finish."

He resumes his interrupted anecdote, and Vera quits the park, and returns home. He does not know her. It gives her a pang, so keen, so hot, so sharp, that she is indignant with herself. He does not know her, her very face is blotted out of his memory; while she—meet him how, when, or where she might—she *knows* she would instantly recognize him. She has changed, it is true; six years have wonderfully transformed her, and yet, if he cared for her, if he ever had cared for her, would not some subtle intuition tell him it was she? He has not altered much; the deep gray eyes look graver, she thinks, than of old; he is browner, more resolute, and more soldier-like than the Captain Dick of Shaddeck Light. Old days, old thoughts, old memories, crowd back upon her—she lives over again that brief bright summer that transformed her whole life. That wild August night, that night of lightning and rain, returns to her; that night she can never forget, that she would blot forever from her life if she could, is before her. To atone for her folly, driven to it by Dora, he made her his wife, despising her all the while, and now he is here, and he looks in her face with calm, unconscious, unrecognizing eyes. Her heart has not ceased its quickened beating when she stands before her sister, and Mrs. Fanshawe's searching eyes read something more than usual in the excited gleam of Vera's dark eyes.

"You have been in the park," she says. "I don't see that it has benefited you much. You are pale, and your eyes look strangely. Has anything happened?"

"Nothing has happened," Vera answers, a little tremor in the clear voice. "It is time to go and dress for the garden party, I suppose. I wish we were not due, Dot—must we really go?"

"Since when has it become a grievance to go to garden parties, my dear," inquires Dora. "If my memory serves, no longer ago than yesterday you were looking forward with pleasure to an afternoon spent in Lady Hammerton's lovely gardens. And Sir Beltram is sure to be there."

Vera turns away, the color rising over her dark face.

"Dora," she says, imperiously, "understand me! Once for all, I want you to drop the subject of Sir Beltram Talbot. If I were free, it would still be—but I am not free—who should remember that better than you?"

It is the first time in all these years, that anything like a reproach has passed Vera's lips. But she is full of irritated pain, longing, impatience—she hardly knows what, and the mention of the baronet's name is as "vinegar upon nitre." Dora shrugs her shoulders.

"The more's the pity; it was a horrible blunder, but even the best of us will make blunders. As to your freedom, why, freedom is a thing that may be regained. Vera," she leans forward, "do you know who is here?"

There is a pause. Vera is standing, her back turned, looking out at the sun-lit London street.

"Do you know who is here?" Mrs. Fanshawe repeats.

"Yes, Dot, I know."

The answer is very low, the face Dora cannot see. There is another momentary pause. Dora is rather surprised.

"Since when have you known?"

"Since yesterday afternoon, before we went to drive. I have seen him twice."

Once more a pause. "So," Dora thinks, "the murder is out. And she has seen him twice. Now I wonder if I am going to have more trouble than I expected with this business. Vera?"

"Yes, I hear."

"Turn round then; I hate talking to people's backs. Where have you seen Colonel Ffrench?"

"Once—a glimpse—yesterday in passing his room, without knowing it was he, and this morning in Hyde Park."

"Did he see *you?*"

"Yes."

"Did he know you?"

"No!" says Vera, and turns abruptly away once again.

Dora sits silent. Shall she speak now? She glances at her watch—after two—and they have to dress. No, there is no time.

"Vera," she says, and rises and goes over to her sister and clasps her hands on her shoulder, "tell me this—you never used to have secrets from Dot—do you still care for Richard Ffrench?"

But Vera frees herself, turning very pale.

"Pardon me, Dot," she answers, coldly and proudly; "that is a question even you have no right to ask, a question I certainly shall not answer. What is done is done—I have never reproached you for your share in it, and I never mean to. You acted for the best, I am sure. But one thing, two things I must exact—that you will let me alone about Sir Beltram Talbot, whom from first to last I have never by one word or look encouraged, and that you will from this hour drop all interference between Richard Ffrench and me. On this I insist, and you will pardon me, Dot, if *I* seem to speak harshly. Harsh I have no wish to be, decisive I must be. I know it was you who forced him—against his will—to marry me, a poor little ignorant half-grown girl, too young and far too much of a child, to understand either your mo

tives or his. Oh! Dot, Dot, why did you do it? I turn hot with shame from head to foot when I think of it. But all that is past; I am no longer too young or too ignorant to judge for myself, to decide for myself, and I say to you, interfere no more. Bring about no meeting between Colonel Ffrench and me, leave him to himself. If he wishes to seek me, if he has anything to say to me, I am to be found; but I tell you honestly, Dot, if you seek him out, or try to influence him in any way, I will never, to the last day of my life, forgive you."

She turns to go as she says it. Her eyes flash, her voice rings; there is resolute decision in every word she speaks. On the threshold she pauses. "When you can spare Félician," she says, in a different tone, "send her to me, please; I will be ready in about an hour."

Then she goes. Dora shrugs her shoulders, and smiles sarcastically.

"High-flown as usual. The chance encounter this morning has evidently upset her imperial highness, or is it pique that he did not recognize her? I foresee I shall have no easy matter to manage, and there can be no shadow of doubt but that she is as fond of him as ever. But I never fail in anything I set my heart on, and I have quite set my heart on seeing you Lady Talbot, my dear, ridiculous, tragic Vera, and Lady Talbot you yet shall be."

Something more than an hour after, the sisters are rolling along behind a pair of black, high-stepping, silver-harnessed horses, to Hammerton Park. Mrs. Dane Fanshawe, under her white gossamer veil and rose silk parasol, looks about three-and-twenty, some yards off. Miss Martinez in white muslin, all delicate needlework and lace, the sort of dress which all the gentlemen who see her this afternoon will extol for its charming simplicity, and which none but a young duchess or an American heiress, could afford to wear, looks beautiful, high-bred, and rather bored. All dangerous topics

are ignored, it is not well to begin a garden party on a July afternoon by losing one's temper, and Dora foresees she is likely to lose her temper more than once before the *affaire* Ffrench is adjusted to her liking. On their return she will open the siege, and meantime here they are, and here is Sir Beltram, with all a lover's eagerness and glad delight in the greeting he gives them. Vera bites her lip as she meets that glance, and reads the story it so plainly tells. She feels pained, angered, humiliated by her false position. She seems to herself a living lie, the wife of a man whose name she does not bear, who cares nothing for her, who looks at her with cold, unrecognizing eyes. Time, that can help most ills, only intensifies this; every day she feels the deception, the falsity, the absolute disgrace of her position, more and more. That fatal night at Shaddeck, that fatal forced marriage. For a moment she feels as if it were impossible to forgive Dora for what she has done—she breaks off suddenly with a great start. A man has just passed her, Lady Hammerton on his arm, and she recognizes him instantly—Dr. Emil Englehart.

"Do you know him?" Sir Beltran asks in surprise; "he is one of the Cuban patriots. They seem to be Lady Hammerton's latest hobby, very fine fellows too—dined with them last night, this Dr. Englehart, Colonel Ffrench—Ah! here is another, General Lopez. By the by, *you* are a Cuban, are you not, Miss Martinez? Curious I never thought of it before."

"My father was a Cuban," Vera answers, and looks with a smile at General Lopez. He is a mahogany-colored little officer, the centre of a listening group, and is evidently deep in dramatic narrative. He gesticulates wildly as he talks, shoulders, eyebrows, hands, all in motion together.

"The gallant general is fighting his battles over again," says Sir Beltran; "he is rabid in his hatred of Spain and Spaniards, is as brave as a small lion, and has had no end

of hair-breadth escapes. So have they all, for that matter, especially Ffrench, who is more like a paladin of the chivalric era, than an every-day soldier. Hear the general."

"The Spanish warfare upon the Cubans has, throughout the contest, been a reproach to civilization in its devilish brutality," the Cuban general is excitedly exclaiming; "it consists, on the part of the Spaniards, in the fiendish murder of any hapless prisoners they may take, brutal, cold-blooded, atrocious murder. Witness the massacre of the Virginius. Spain will never conquer Cuba; the very stones will rise and fight for freedom, if we lay down our arms."

"Yes, general," a pensive voice says, "all that is a matter of history, but it is a digression at the same time. How did you and Colonel Ffrench escape? You were kneeling in the trench a moment ago, your eyes bandaged, waiting to be shot, you know."

There is a slight laugh, and the fiery little general comes back to his story. All listen intensely. Vera listens breathlessly. It is a story of dreadful danger, of mortal peril, and Richard Ffrench and himself are the heroes, a story of death and daring, of cruel suffering and invincible "pluck." And as Vera stands and hears, the old passion of pity and tenderness that sent her flying to Shaddeck Light that memorable evening so long ago, stirs within her again. An unspeakable longing to meet him, to speak to him, to see recognition in his eyes, thrills her. Is he here this afternoon? It seems likely enough since Dr. Englehart and General Lopez are. What if they meet?——

She breaks off and falls into a day-dream, long, sweet, and full of wonderful possibilities. Afar off a band is playing, the charming music floats to her, softened by distance, and blends with her dreams. Many people move about her, but for the moment she is quite alone, even the ubiquitous Sir Beltran is nowhere to be seen. Presently voices reach her, and she awakes, and moves on. She is passing down a

narrow walk, lined with briery roses, and one of the long spiky branches catches her dress. She tries to disentangle it, but in one hand she holds her parasol, in the other a bouquet, and the thorny branch holds her fast. The voices draw nearer, men's voices. "Permit me," one says, and with a slight smile stoops and frees her. He lifts his hat, gives her a slight glance, and passes on.

Is there a fatality in these things? This is twice to-day, and this time they are so near that they touch, and still the same indifferent glance of a total stranger. Dr. Englehart is with him, and it is *he* that turns and looks back, a puzzled expression on his face.

"Where have I seen eyes like those before?" he says. "Who is that young lady, Dick?"

"Haven't an idea. I have seen her before, though—this morning in the park. A compatriot of ours I believe, and handsome enough for a duchess."

"Handsomer than any duchess I have seen yet, and—by Jove! I have it. Ffrench, is it possible *you* don't see it——." He stops and looks back again in sudden excitement. "By Jove!" he exclaims and laughs, "here is a romance if you like. Dick, does that lady remind you of *no* one you have ever seen?"

"Of no one," calmly responds Richard Ffrench. "Of whom does she remind *you?*"

"Of your wife, by Jove! of the little black-eyed girl you married six years ago. On my soul, I believe it is the same. They are in London, are they not?"

Richard Ffrench stops and looks at his friend. Then he looks back. She has gone on, but is still in sight, walking slowly. His dark face pales under its bronze. On the instant conviction flashes upon him. Changed, changed out of all knowledge, grown from slim girlhood to stately womanhood, but the eyes, the deep, lustrous, lovely eyes, are the same. Can it indeed be Vera?

He turns to go after her, has gone half a dozen paces, when he as suddenly stops. For at the other end of the walk, appear Mrs. Dane Fanshawe and Sir Beltran Talbot. All that Dora has said to him flashes back; she has fallen in love with this man, she seeks a divorce to free her from *him*, that she may marry the baronet. See her he must. but not now, not here.

He rejoins his friend. Englehart looks at him keenly. He thinks Dick has been rather a fool in the affair of his marriage; but as his marriage has never interfered with his freedom or made him the less a *bon camarade*, he has hitherto overlooked it.

"You—you are sure it is she?" he asks, hesitatingly.

"Quite sure."

"And you did not know until I spoke?"

"I did not."

"Why did you not join her? Oh! I see. Dick, your little wife has grown into a very beautiful woman."

"Very beautiful."

He echoes the words of his friend automatically. He feels bewildered. To have met Vera and not known her! Has she known him? Yes, he is sure of it. He recalls the glance she gave him this morning, and just now as he freed her dress and turned away. She was very pale, too. And she loves Sir Beltran Talbot and wishes to marry him. Last night, listening to perfumed, painted Dora Fanshawe, it had seemed to him he did not care—much, but he is conscious of a sharp, angry contraction of the heart now. Dear little Vera! how frankly, fearlessly fond she was of him once. He recalls her as she stood by his side that morning at Shaddeck Light, and defied them all for his sake. He recalls her as they parted last, crushed, humiliated, trembling with pain and shame. And this is little Vera, this tall, proud-looking, calm-eyed, brilliant woman, who knows him and makes no sign. It may be Vera, but not the Vera he has known.

Colonel Ffrench is very *distrait* and silent all the rest of that day. His eyes wander everywhere, but they do not see what they search for. For a lion, he roars very little, to the silent indignation of Lady Hammerton and her fair friends. He is so handsome, so like a hero of romance, he has the true *air noble*, they are so generously prepared to admire everything he says, and behold! he says nothing, is grave, silent, preoccupied. The Fanshawe party have gone, he discovers presently—Sir Beltran Talbot with them. Miss Martinez had a headache, they have left thus early on her account. Colonel Ffrench listens, and says little, but he thinks he understands. It is to avoid him, lest he should seek her out, and make a scene, and the baronet perhaps discover the truth. Well, they know him very little if they fear that. In all these years her image has been with him, but always the image of a wild-eyed, black-haired gipsy, the Vera who rowed with him in the Nixie, who sang for him in the lamp-light, the Vera who cooked his supper at Shaddeck Light. He smiles as he tries to reconcile that Vera and this—that Vera whom he stands pledged to engage as his cook, this Vera, exquisitely dressed, proud, and silent, a fair and gracious lady. Little Vera! little Vera—his wife, and this is the way they meet at last!

CHAPTER VI.

A SUMMER NIGHT.

AS it chances it is not Miss Martinez's headache that sends the Fanshawe party home, although Miss Martinez's sister makes that the pretext for a sudden retreat. Superb in her fine young vitality, Vera never has headaches, nor aches of any sort, but Dora has caught a

glimpse of a certain sunburned Cuban colonel, and scents danger afar off. He here, of all people, and the hero of the hour, his name on many lips. He and Vera will meet, and that meeting is the very last thing Dora wishes to take place. Some time or other it is inevitable, but she will get ahead of fate itself, she will bring Vera to a proper frame of mind, by a little judicious, sisterly chat. So she is seized all in a moment with sudden and serious indisposition, lays hold of Sir Beltran, and on his arm goes in search of her sister. To Dora's eye it is rather a striking tableau that greets her as she enters the rose path. Vera coming slowly towards her, a sort of cold pallor on the dusky warmth of her face, and following her, Richard Ffrench. Have they then spoken? has the dreaded meeting taken place? Is she too late? One hurried glance tells her no. He stops at sight of them, Vera never turns around, and in a moment she is borne out of danger, but Mrs. Fanshawe does not breathe freely until they are safely in the carriage, and driving rapidly homeward.

They are a silent trio, even Dora can be silent when there is nothing to be gained by talking. She lies back among the cushions, and under the rose silk parasol watches Vera askance. But there is not much to be read in that still, thoughtful face—in those large serious eyes—Vera will never wear her heart on her sleeve for daws to pick at. The baronet is silent, too; he is beside Miss Martinez, and sufficient unto the hour is the bliss thereof.

Mr. Dane Fanshawe, reclining negligently among the cushions of a divan in his wife's dressing-room, lays down the paper he is reading, and looks up with a friendly and conciliatory smile on his listless, handsome blonde face.

"Back so soon, my angel? You must have left Lady Hammerton's uncommonly early. I trust you found it pleasant?"

"And I trust *you* amused yourself well at Hampton Court

Are there any new beauties on the walls or—off? Are there any new trees in Bushy Park? And you lunched at the 'Mitre,' no doubt, with your unsophisticated backwoods friends. Did Mrs. Ellerton make one of the party?" demands Dora, changing suddenly from the intensely sarcastic to the spitefully jealous.

Mr. Fanshawe pulls his long light mustache, and lifts his fair eyebrows wearily.

"No, my angel. Mrs. Ellerton was *not* of the party, I regret to say. You do that very charming actress the honor of being jealous of her, don't you? I wonder why? I have never paid her any very pronounced attention, and beyond dining with her once or twice at the 'Star and Garter'——"

Mrs. Fanshawe turns her back upon him, and sweeps out of the room. Mr. Fanshawe watches her for a moment, with amused, sleepy, half-closed eyes. Then he rises on his elbow and calls.

"My love."

No reply.

"My dearest Dora."

Silence.

"My angel."

Dora removes her bonnet, gloves, and lace drapery with compressed lips.

"Do look here one moment please," says Mr. Fanshawe, plaintively, "don't be angry. I really have been boring myself to death, at Hampton Court, with the people I mentioned. Met them by chance, and couldn't shake them off, I assure you—awful bore, you know. On my word I should greatly have preferred going with you and our lovely sister to the garden party, because you see I discovered that Ffrench and Lopez, and all those Cuban fighting fellows were to be there, and you were sure to meet. And the meeting could not fail to be more amusing to a dispassionate looker-on in Vienna, like myself behind the scenes, than any

vaudeville ever played. Come *petite ange*, chase away those clouds, smile once more upon your slave, and tell me all about it. Did the bride and bridegroom meet?"

Dora relents. After all, she is very fond of her husband, why else has she married him? and she is dying to make a confidant of some one. And if he really has not been with that odious actress——

"I see you have brought Sir Beltrad Talbot home to dinner," resumes Mr. Fanshawe in his slow *trainante* voice. "He dined with the Cubans here last evening—told me about it—admires Ffrench beyond everything. Believe me, my angel, when I say I laughed. It is really the richest joke of the season."

"I can quite believe it," retorts Mrs. Fanshawe; "the misfortunes of our neighbors are always the richest of jokes, I understand. As it chances, however, even your keen sense of the ridiculous would have been at fault here. There has been nothing to laugh at; so you see you have lost nothing after all by being a martyr to your country, and escorting your American cousins to Hampton Court."

"They did not meet then?"

"They met, yes, that is to say she has seen him twice, three times. But she has not spoken to him. *I*, however, have."

"Ah!" says Mr. Fanshawe with more interest than he generally shows; "when?"

"Last night, after our return. The dinner-party you speak of was still in progress. And I sent for him here."

"Ah!" Mr. Fanshawe, repeats, "and he came?"

"He came at once, and we had a long and very serious talk. I laid the case before him. I spoke of the change in Vera; and, by the by, Dane, you who never knew her six years ago, have not the faintest conception how greatly she is changed. I spoke of Sir Beltram Talbot, and his love for her, of the dreadful blunder of the marriage, of Vera's love for Sir Beltran——"

Mr. Fanshawe lies back among the pillows, and laughs.

"You told him that! What a plucky Amazon you are, my Dora, and, by Jove! what a pleasant thing to tell a man—that his wife is in love with another fellow, and 'please may she have a divorce and marry him?' By Jove, you know!" Mr. Dane Fanshawe laughs in his lazy pleasant way again.

"I see nothing to laugh at," says Dora, austerely; "neither did Colonel Ffrench."

"I should think not, by Jove!" parenthetically from the gentleman on the divan.

"We discussed the matter in all its bearings, and I will do him this justice: no one could have been more amenable to reason than he. He acknowledged the justice of all my remarks."

"My angel," says Mr. Fanshawe, and looks at his wife with amused eyes, "tell me this. Do you mean to say Colonel Ffrench—this fire-eating free-lance—sat before you while you told him his wife wanted to marry another man, and acknowledged the justice of your remarks? My hearing is not usually defective, but I really think it must have deceived me just now."

"What is there extraordinary in it if he did? It was an exceptional marriage, it is an exceptional case all through. He admitted that nothing I told him surprised him; he said it was exactly what he had expected, and that if Vera wanted a divorce, he would not lift a finger to prevent it."

"Ah!" remarks Mr. Fanshawe, for the third time, "*if* Vera wants a divorce. But if I am any judge of my nearest and dearest, it is not Vera who wants the divorce, but Dora. I am rather short of ready money at present, but I don't mind laying you a sovereign or two that when you propose the D. C. to Ve a, she refuses. Come! I'll give you five to one on it."

"Excuse me, Mr. Fanshawe, I neither bet nor gamble;

one of that kind is enough in any family. It is very possible she may refuse, just at first—all the same, it shall be an accomplished fact by this time next year. Now as I see you are dressed, suppose we drop this discussion, and you join Sir Beltran in the drawing-room," says Dora, decisively.

Mr. Fanshawe rises negligently, and still vastly amused. To him the whole thing is a most capital joke.

"I only wish I knew this Cuban colonel, I would most certainly have invited him to join our select little family party to-day. He, and Vera, and the baronet, would make a most interesting and unique group. I wonder if he knew her when they met? She must have changed a good deal in six years."

Mr. Fanshawe saunters away, after his usual indolent fashion, to the drawing-room, where he finds Vera, and Vera alone.

"Oh! sweetest, my sister," is Mr. Dane Fanshawe's greeting, "what have you done with our guest? I am under orders to entertain Sir Beltran Talbot, and was told I should find him here."

"He has been called away for a moment," Vera answers, coldly. She does not like her brother-in-law, she never has liked him. The "languid swell" is a species of biped she especially detests, and a languid swell Mr. Fanshawe is, or nothing. Why Dora ever married him is the chronic wonder of her life; she wonders now for the thousandth time, as he stands smiling, complacent, self-satisfied, here beside her. Compare him with other men, with Sir Beltran Talbot, who enters on the instant, with Richard Ffrench, but no, even in thought there can be no comparison there. There are times when she hates him, this self-sufficient, shallow, empty-headed coxcomb, who makes Dot so miserably unhappy with his vices and follies; who drifts through life, aimless, purposeless, lazy, caring for himself, and his own comfort and pleasure, and for nothing else under the sun.

They look a cozy little family party enough, sitting in the pleasant after-glow of the sunset, over a most excellent dinner, two pretty, richly dressed women, two well-looking, well-bred men. But perhaps of the quartet, Mr. Dane Fanshawe, with his subtle sense of humor, is the only one who really enjoys himself. It is not half a bad joke to sit here and watch the admiration in poor Sir Beltran's eyes, Dora's smiling graciousness and encouragement, Vera "keeping herself to herself," hundreds of miles away in spirit, with Ffrench no doubt. It is almost better in the drawing-room after dinner, with Dora at the piano, interpreting Chopin and Strauss, Sir Beltran beside Colonel Ffrench's wife, and he, the amused looker-on and listener, lying in silent enjoyment of it all. If his wife brings about the consummation she so devoutly wishes, in the face of all that chill, delicate frostiness, why then his wife is a cleverer little person than he gives her credit for. Miss Martinez is one of those uplifted sort of people who are a law unto themselves; she is very fond of her sister; but where her heart or her conscience is concerned (and she is the sort of a woman, unfortunately rare, to possess both), there will be a line which that sister must not cross.

Two hours later, Vera sits in her room, glad it is over, glad to be alone, glad to be away from Sir Beltran Talbot's too ardent glances, from his too tender words. The lace draperies hanging over the windows flutter in the damp night wind, for a fog from the river is rising. Two or three wax tapers light the room with a soft glow, and reveal her face, pale and more wearied than Vera's bright face often looks. But a tender musing half-smile is there too, and her thougnts are not of Sir Beltran Talbot. *He* does not know her—well, that is not strange; there is not much resemblance between the girl of sixteen and the woman of twenty-two. But he will find her out, she feels sure of that; tomorrow, at the latest, he will come, and then——a tap. Dora,

in a white dressing-gown, all her floss silk fair hair undone, and hanging over her shoulders, enters without ceremony.

"What!" she says, "not begun to undress. What are you mooning about, I wonder, as you sit here, with that ridiculous smile, all by yourself? You used never have any thoughts or secrets from me, but now—Vera, I wonder if any one in the world ever changed as utterly in six years as you? I don't mean alone in looks—in everything."

She seats herself in a low chair, and gazes curiously at her sister.

"They say we all turn into somebody else every seven years, don't they? You certainly have, and I don't like that somebody else half as well as your former self. What a wild, silly, ignorant child you were; what a dignified, wise, self-repressed young woman you are! I wonder what has done it—your marriage?"

"Perhaps," Vera says, slowly. "Yes, my marriage and—what followed. The revelation of how and why Richard Ffrench made me his wife came so quickly, stunned me so utterly—I think I have never felt quite the same since."

Her face darkens as she recalls it. Has there ever been a day since that that parting scene has not been before her, that Mrs. Charlton's harsh and false words have not sounded in her ears?

"A more venomous old toad never lived," says Dora, trenchantly; "what a happy release it must have been for Eleanor when she died. By the by, I wonder where *is* Eleanor? And that reminds me—do you know what I found the other day hidden among some things of Mr. Fanshawe's? A portrait of Eleanor Charlton."

Vera looks up silently. Nothing that Dora can find in Mr. Fanshawe's possession will greatly surprise her, but this comes near it.

"Eleanor's portrait? Are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure—do you think I could be mistaken?

And there were her initials 'E. C.,' New Orleans, and the date of the year—the very summer we spent together at Charlton."

Vera is silent. Where Dane Fanshawe is concerned silence is always safest and best.

"I taxed him with it, of course," pursues Dora, in an irritated tone, "and, of course, also got a few plausible lies in return. He couldn't for the life of him remember how the photograph had come into his possession—he had never known the original. Bah! I never believe a word he tells me."

Mrs. Fanshawe allows no sentiment of false delicacy to prevent her pouring her marital grievances into her sister's reluctant ears. She feels she must tell or die.

"Where is Mr. Fanshawe?" Vera asks, after a pause.

"Gone out," his wife answers with a short, contemptuous laugh. "When is Mr. Fanshawe *not* gone out? I dare say his man will help him up to bed somewhere in the small hours. Vera, what a fool I was ever to marry that man?"

The small, worn face looks woefully pinched and pale haggard and gloomy as she says it. It is a very aged fairy that sits here in the glow of the wax lights, making this wifely confession—a very old and faded fairy. Vera looks at her, tender pity in her eyes.

"Yes, Dot," she says, compassionately, "I think myself it was a—mistake. Do you know I have often wondered *why* you married him. You are not of the sort to fall in love easily, and if you were, what is there in Mr. Fanshawe to fall in love with?"

"Ah! what?" Dora says, bitterly. "Do you think I never ask myself that question? He has neither brains nor ability, heart or feeling for any human creature. He has a handsome face and wears his clothes well," with a short, mirthless laugh; "I suppose it must have been for those two excellent reasons. People commit suicide under temporary

aberration of mind—do you suppose they never marry under the same?"

A smile dawns on Vera's face—a sort of wondering, scornful smile.

"'And Abdallah grew to be a man,'" she quotes from the Turkish legend, "'and was so handsome that a hundred maidens died for love of him.' Well! it is done I know, but I never shall understand it—why any woman in her senses, and past sixteen will marry a man for his face alone. At sixteen," says Miss Martinez, retrospectively, "we are fools enough for anything. When a man spoils his life for the sake of two blue eyes and a pretty complexion, we take it as a matter of course—he belongs to the privileged sex, to whom all folly is possible and pardonable; but for a woman ——"

"And a woman of thirty—don't forget to add *that*," puts in Mrs. Fanshawe, with intense self-scorn. "I don't wonder you wonder. And to add bathos to folly I am besotted enough to be fond of him yet. While he—but there! it is just one of the things that won't bear talking of, and I did not come here at this hour of night to discuss my madness or my husband. I came, Vera, to talk of—yours."

A shadow of annoyance passes over Vera's face. Of all subjects this one, as discussed by Dora, is most distasteful to her.

"I wish you would not," she says, her dark brows contracting. "Believe me, Dot, it is better not. I thought we had said our final say on that subject this morning."

"*You* did, you mean—I said nothing, if you remember. It is my turn now. Vera, your warning came too late. Last night, after we returned from the ball—after you were in bed and asleep, I sent for Colonel Ffrench and had it out."

"Dot! at that hour! three in the morning!"

"Improper, was it?" laughs Dora. "You are not jealous,

I hope. We don't stand in the nicer shades of propriety where vital interests are at stake. And one's brother-in-law and step-son combined is privileged. Yes, I sent for him—they were having a dinner party, and keeping it up until morning, it seems; and he came, and, as I say, we had it out."

"Had what out?" Vera's voice is thoroughly iced, and impatient also. "Good Heavens!" she thinks, "will Dot never let other people's business alone?"

"The subject of your marriage, my dear—I don't mind admitting that I began it. Vera, it is of no use your mounting to the tops of High and Mightydom with me. It is I who made the mistake—it is I who am in duty bound to repair it. Colonel Ffrench thinks as I do, that it was a horrible blunder, and the sooner it can be set right the better."

Vera turns to her, a slight color rising and deepening in her face, a slow angry light kindling in her eyes.

"Yes," she says, steadily, "a horrible blunder, and the sooner it can be set right the better! How do you and Colonel Ffrench purpose setting it right?"

"There is but one way—and here he agrees with me, too, that no time should be lost—a divorce!"

A flash—swift, dark, fierce—leaps from Vera's eyes. She half rises.

"Dot!"

"A divorce," goes on Dora, steadily. "Sit down Vera. There need be no publicity, he says; you can apply for it in some obscure State when we return to America; he will, of course, interfere in no way with the action of the law—he pledges himself to this. 'I will not lift a finger to prevent it'—those were his words. 'I should be sorry to stand in the way of your sister's accession to fortune and rank'—those are his words too. Of course he has heard of Sir Beltran——"

She stops. Vera has risen in a sudden flame of wrath to her feet.

"Dora!" she cries, "look at me! tell me the truth! Do you mean to say Richard Ffrench said *that*—urged a divorce—spoke of my marrying another man?"

The words seem to choke her—she stops, gasping.

"I mean to say he said every word I tell you," Dora answers with dignity, and meeting the blazing black eyes full. "Do you think I tell lies? Those were Richard Ffrench's exact words; ask him, if you like. He looks upon his marriage as the bane of his life, he looks upon a divorce as the one atonement that can be made. Will you kindly sit down again, or do you intend doing a little high tragedy for my exclusive benefit?"

Vera sits down. The flush fades from her face, and leaves it grayish pale. She even laughs.

"I beg your pardon, Dot; I won't do high tragedy any more. Pray go on. I should like to hear a few more of Colonel Ffrench's forcible remarks."

"We discussed the matter fully," goes on, obediently, Mrs. Fanshawe, "in all its bearings. You cannot blame him, Vera, that he is most anxious to regain his freedom. Any man would in his place. And—he did not say so in express words, remember—but I infer that in Cuba there is some one—a lady——"

"Yes. Go on."

"Well—perhaps I had better not, and he really did not say so directly. But one can always tell—men are so transparent in these things. He has heard of Sir Beltran's attentions, and he spoke very handsomely—said he need never know—of the divorce, I mean."

"Yes."

"He leaves England shortly, and will soon after return to Cuba. There is every possibility, he thinks, of his remaining definitely there."

"Yes."

"And he said he thought it best under the circumstances not to seek an interview with you. It could only be painful and embarrassing to you both. That is why to-day—I am almost sure—he feigned not to know you when you met. For, of course, he knows you—you have changed, but not so utterly as that."

"Yes."

Mrs. Fanshawe smiles.

"How long do you intend to go on saying 'yes,' like an automaton? Turn round, Vera, and let me see you. Tell me you agree with what I say about the divorce. Believe me, child, it is the only thing to be done, for you and for him. And then you can become Lady——"

Vera turns round, turns so suddenly, so imperiously, that Dora recoils.

"That will do, Dot. I have not much to say; I will not be tragic or high-flown if I can help it. Hear me, and hear me on this matter for the last time. Neither from you nor any other human being will I tolerate a word on the subject of my marriage more. I will never apply for a divorce—I will never marry again. If Sir Beltran Talbot were one of her Majesty's sons, and I were free by law to-morrow, I would not marry him. Colonel Ffrench may free himself or not, as he pleases, and as he can—for me there shall be no divorce, no lovers, no marrying! As I am to-night I will go to my grave. And if ever you, Dot, see him again and discuss me with him as you did last night, as surely as we both sit here, I will leave you! I will leave you, and will never return!"

Dora sits mute, shrinking, startled, confounded.

"Let us not quarrel," Vera says, after a moment, in an unsteady voice, "let us finish with this now, and forever. It is a miserable affair from first to last. Oh! a miserable, miserable affair! I am tired my head aches I think, and—and—good-night, Dot!"

Dora rises, dignified but disgusted, and without deigning to notice the hand her sister holds out, sails in silence from the room. The door bangs behind her, and Vera is alone.

But not the same Vera. She sits where Dora has left her, and she knows her fate. She believes what she has heard. She sits quite motionless a long time—her hand over her eyes. A long time—so long that the rain is pattering sharply against the glass, and the raw London fog floating dankly through the open windows before she stirs. But she rises at last, and as she turns to the light, both hand and face are wet with tears.

CHAPTER VII.

"WE FELL OUT, MY WIFE AND I."

THERE! Look to the left, Colonel Ffrench, it is the Countess of Davenant—she is bowing. Do you not remember meeting her? Ah! yonder is Mrs. Fanshawe; how pretty and—yes, youthful she is—at this distance. Those petite blondes make up so admirably. That is Miss Martinez beside her, of course, and also of course that is Sir Beltran Talbot with them. You do not know Miss Martinez? She was at Lady Hammerton's garden party last week. She is an American, or Cuban, I really do not know which, but a compatriot of yours, mon colonel, in any case, and one of the most charming *débutantes* of the season. They tell me all your American women of the best type are like that, pale, *spirituelle*, haughty. She makes one of our party to-day at Richmond with the Dame Fanshawe's. She is quite the fashion, and asked everywhere. They leave almost immediately, to-morrow or next day, for New York. No doubt Sir Beltran will get leave of absence

and follow. They say she is an heiress, but even for one of your rich country women it will be a brilliant match. He is the *parti* of the season, and—ah!"

Mrs. De Vigne pauses—she looks, first at the Fanshawe party, then at the Cuban colonel, who sits beside her. The scene is the Park—the hour five in the afternoon. The crush of carriages has come to a dead lock. Directly opposite her pretty Victoria, is a barouche; seated therein Mrs. Dane Fanshawe, Miss Martinez, and beside them, curbing, with some difficulty, his impatient horse, Sir Beltran Talbot. Colonel Ffrench's quick eyes have seen them even before those of his fair companion, and his dark brows bend, and his resolute lips compress as his gaze rests on Vera and her attendant knight. What all the world says must surely be true, and seeing, the universe over, is believing. Sir Beltran's story is written in his frank English face, for all the Lady's Mile to read, if it listeth.

For Vera, she lies back listlessly enough, a trifle bored. but very handsome—so handsome that a thrill of wonder, of recognition, of pleasure, of pain, goes through the heart of the man who watches her. His wife! He is amazed at himself that, in spite of all changes, he has not recognized her from the first; for, despite all its beauty, he sees now it is the very face of little Vera, and the deep, large, lustrous eyes—they are unchanged. Sir Beltran is talking—she is listening—answering—smiling, too, but in an absent and preoccupied way, and with a proud indifference she takes no pains to hide. A sharp pang of angry jealousy knits Richard Ffrench's brows. She is his—his wife—what has this man, any man on earth to do with her but himself? His resolution is taken on the instant—there shall be no divorce—his wife she is, his wife she shall remain—no man shall win or wear what belongs to him. She may have forgotten, but she loved him once—child or woman, it matters not, she loved him. She shall love him again. She may be ambitious, she

may be worldly—she may be like her sister, and yet he cannot believe it. That is a noble, a true, a pure, a womanly face, if he is any judge of faces. And little Vera cannot have changed her whole nature. How beautiful she is—not one of these fair, delicate patricians he sees about her, are half or quarter so lovely. And she is his wife——

Sir Beltran Talbot glances at him, and salutes Mrs. De Vigne. Then he stoops with a smile, and speaks to Vera. She looks up, her eyes and the eyes of Richard Ffrench meet. He knows her now—at last!—and there flashes from hers one passionate gleam of anger, and scorn, and contempt, that even Mrs. De Vigne cannot fail to see. She turns to him in wonder.

"She knows you," she says, almost involuntarily, "I thought ——"

She checks herself and looks away. But in that moment she had divined with a woman's quickness in these things, that the dark, dashing soldier of fortune by her side, has had his romance, and that the end is not yet. And Miss Martinez—is this the secret of her proud indifference to all men, of her coldness to Sir Beltran. Colonel Ffrench is the sort of man to win a woman's heart and keep it. They have known each other in America—been lovers, perhaps. And now they meet as strangers, and Miss Martinez's superb black eyes blaze as they look on him. Mrs. De Vigne makes up her mind that she will watch them this afternoon, and find out something of this interesting little romance if she dies for it. They were to have staid—the Dame Fanshawe's, until the end of the season. Now they depart abruptly this week. Has the unexpected advent of the Cuban colonel anything to do with this rapid exodus?

Nothing is said—there is a break in the line, and the carriages pass. But in Colonel Ffrench's face there is a change which his fair friend is quick to see. She is a pretty little woman, a married flirt of the most pronounced order, and

his handsome, free lance, has caught her inflammable fancy from the first. He is due to-day at her villa near Richmond. The Dame Fanshawe's and Sir Beltran Talbot are also to be guests. It is the last invitation the Fanshawes will accept, as Mrs. De Vigne gayly puts it to her companion—positively the last appearance of Miss Martinez. No doubt the engagement will be announced almost immediately. It will be a most brilliant match for Miss Martinez. Beautiful she is—of that there can be no question, but mere beauty counts for so little, and Sir Beltran, with his rent roll, and his pedigree, might have won the highest in the land. Still he is absolutely untrammeled, and his passion for *la belle Americaine* is a thing to marvel at, in these degenerate days.

Mrs. De Vigne's gay little tongue runs merrily all the way during that drive to Richmond. Her companion says very little—as a rule he says little—but he is more silent to-day than she has ever known him. A total revulsion of feeling has taken place with him at sight of his wife and the man beside her. Shall Dora Fanshawe, ambitious, scheming, unprincipled, rule his whole life? Once she found him plastic as wax in her hands; shall she find him so forever. And yet, was it altogether her tears, Mrs. Charlton's bitter words, his step-father's decree, that caused his marriage? Even in these far-off days was not little Vera dear to him, was it not to save her possible pain; was it not because she cared for him, and it would make her happy? He does not know, he cannot tell. That distant time is as a dream—it seems to him just now as if he must have loved her all his life. She is his wife—his wife she shall remain. What was it Dora said about her notions of wifely duty and honor? he had paid but little heed that night. What if Dora is at the bottom of it all? if that talk of divorce, and unhappiness, and love for Sir Beltran be but a little skilful fiction of her own? He knows Mrs. Fanshawe of old, knows that most of her

glib chatter is to be taken with a pinch of salt. What if the old girlish fancy be not quite dead despite six years of Mrs. Fanshawe? What if life holds other possibilities more blissful even than fighting for freedom and Cuba? To-day they will meet. He will seek her out, and put his fate to the touch, to win or lose it all. They go so soon, and when once apart who knows when they may meet again?

"Welcome to Richmond," cries the gay voice of Mrs. De Vigne. "Come back, please, Colonel Ffrench, from—I wonder *where* you have been for the past fifteen minutes, as you sat there staring straight before you, with that dreadfully inflexible and obstinate look! Wherever you were, return, for here we are at last."

* * * * * * *

"I wonder," Dora says, in a low voice, that Sir Beltran may not hear; "I wonder, Vera, if Colonel Ffrench is really en route for Richmond, and makes one of the guests? Mrs. De Vigne's flirtation is certainly more pronounced than even Mrs. De Vigne's flirtations are wont to be, and that is saying a good deal. Shall you mind, dear?"

"If Richard Ffrench is there? Not in the least," says Vera, coldly.

"He saw us, but I did *not* see him. People imagine we are strangers, and a recognition here in the Park would involve so many disagreeable explanations. If he is introduced he will have tact and good taste enough to see and understand. I am afraid it will be awkward for you, Vera; and with Sir Beltran present, too. If we only need not go."

"Why need we?" Vera asks, in the same frosty voice.

"Well, we have accepted, you see, and we cannot plead sudden indisposition, now that she has seen us, and besides, as it is our very last—— Still, dear, if you wish——"

"I have no wish in the matter. It can make very little difference whether Colonel Ffrench is present or not. I think, indeed, on the whole, I should prefer it."

"Prefer it!" Mrs. Fanshawe repeats, startled.

"Prefer it," Vera iterates. Her lips are set, her eyes quite flash, there is a look of invincible resolution on her face. "There are just two or three things I should like to say to Colonel Ffrench—to disabuse his mind, if possible, of one or two little mistakes he may have made in the past. Fate shall settle it. If we meet, I shall speak to him; if we do not, why, we will drift asunder in silence. Now let us drop the subject. As I told you before, Colonel Ffrench is a topic I decline henceforth to discuss."

When Vera's face takes that look, when Vera's voice takes that tone, Dora knows there is no more to be said. She is wise in her generation—beyond a certain point it is always best to let things take their course. She has done her work, and done it well. Vera is proud, and her pride has had its death-blow. She is sensitively womanly and delicate, and that delicate womanliness has been stung to the quick. Dora has seen that flashing passing glance—those two may safely meet, and in all probability it will be for the last time.

A week has passed since that rainy July night. All in a moment Mrs. Fanshawe makes up her mind, and issues her imperial ukase—they are to go home at once. London is not habitable after July, she is fagged out, she is homesick a month's perfect repose at Charlton is imperatively neces sary to her health and happiness. Vera looks at her with real gratitude; she will be glad, unutterably glad to get away. She is so tired of it all, there is so much sameness, so much monotony, so deadly a weariness in it all. Something lies like lead on her heart; she does not care to ask what. To be back at Charlton, under the fresh greenness of the trees, to look once more on the blue brightness of the sea, to be away from Sir Beltran Talbot, to begin all over again, to feel once more *alone*—it is the desire of her heart."

"Thank you, Dot," she says, gratefully, wearily. "Yes, let us go; let us go at once."

So it is settled. Mr. Dane Fanshawe shrugs his shoulders, smiles under his blonde beard, glances at his handsome sister-in-law, and assents. "As the queen wills" is after all the law of the household, although Mr. Fanshawe does pretty much as he pleases in the main. Mrs. Ellerton is a pretty woman and a charming actress, but pretty women abound, and charming actresses are everywhere, and he has known her six weeks, and Dora is growing jealous, poor soul, and Mr. Fanshawe struggles with a yawn, rises languidly, and departs to see about state-rooms. He is not at the Richmond villa to-day; he is dining with Mrs. Ellerton and a select few not on his wife's visiting list, at the "Star and Garter."

Sunset lies low, translucent, rose, and gold, over the world. It is neither classic Tiber, dreamy Nile, nor flowing Arno—it is only the Thames above Richmond, but the river glides cool, blue, bright between its green wooded banks—a strip of silver ribbon between belts of emerald green.

Mrs. De Vigne's place is a dream of delight, of all rare and radiant flowers, of ancestral oaks, elms, and copper beeches, slanting down to the river-side, and Mrs. De Vigne is a very queen of hostesses. The house is cool and breezy, the dinner the masterpiece of a *chef*, the guests select, well chosen, and not too many. Removed from him by nearly the whole length of the table, and on the same side, sits Vera, so Colonel Ffrench, seated near his hostess, catches but one or two fleeting glimpses of her during the ceremonial. She is dressed in pale, gold-colored silk, with black laces, and she wears diamonds. He has never seen her in jewels before, and the flashing brilliants and rich-hued silk become her magnificently. She looks regal, he thinks—more beautiful than he has even imagined her, and as unapproachable as a princess. Sir Beltran is not quite by her side, but he is sufficiently near to pay her much more attention than he pays his dinner.

"The Martinez is in capital form this evening," drawls a man near him to his next neighbor; "handsomest woman, by Jove, in England. Pity she goes so soon. Never saw her look half a quarter so superb before."

"It is a way of Miss Martinez's," is the answer, "to look more bewildering each time than the last. And to-day, as you say, she is dazzling. Like the sun, she flashes out most brilliantly just before setting. Lucky fellow, Talbot—confound him!"

"Ah! you may say so," the first speaker responds gloomily, and Richard Ffrench turns with angry impatience away.

How dare these men discuss his wife—link her name with Talbot's. He feels impelled to turn savagely upon them, and annihilate them and all present with the truth.

But he does not—he chafes with irritated impatience and restrains himself. As yet no presentation has taken place—he has no desire for a formal presentation; he will seek her out in the drawing-room and speak to her, if he can, alone. And if the Vera of old is not dead and gone forever, the dear little Vera of Shaddeck Light, he will claim his wife before the world ere it is a week older.

The ladies, at Mrs. De Vigne's telegraphic bow, rise and depart, and he watches in their train that one slender figure, with the mien and grace of a queen. Sir Beltran watches also—he, too, is silent, preoccupied, absent. Ffrench notes it jealously. The interval ends, and they are in the drawing-room, where fair women flutter about like bright-plumaged birds, and there is music, and the subdued tumult of gay voices and laughter. Outside, day is not yet done—the lovely after-glow still lingers, a pearly sickle moon is cut sharply in the sapphire blue, and down in the copse a nightingale is singing. A faint hay-scented breeze stirs the lace window draperies—one or two stars come out in their golden tremulous beauty as he looks. It is a picture he

sees to the last day of his life—photographed sharply as a vision on his brain.

"It is so warm," says some one; "come out and let us hear the nightingale."

A little jewelled hand is pushed through his arm, a pair of soft eyes look up at him, a plaintive voice makes the sentimental speech. But it is only Mrs. De Vigne, and Mrs. De Vigne on mischief bent.

"Do you ever hear nightingales in Cuba or in New York? Look at that moon, Colonel Ffrench, and wish—it is the new moon. What was it you wished for? Ah! Miss Martinez!"

The interjection is at once malicious and apposite, for at the moment Miss Martinez comes in view, and Sir Beltran is with her. They stand in the shadow of the trees, he has both her hands in his, his face is flushed, eager, impassioned. The hour has come! Vera's they cannot see—it is in shadow and averted, but the attitude, the look of Sir Beltran tells the whole story. Mrs. De Vigne glances up at her companion and laughs.

"Only now!" she says, "and I thought it was all settled ages ago. I wanted to introduce you to Miss Martinez, but I suppose it would never do to interrupt *that* tableau. We shall have to go and listen to the nightingale after all."

He stands still, his face dark, his brows knit, his eyes glowing. He neither hears nor heeds. Mrs. De Vigne looks at him with even more interest than she has looked yet.

"Colonel Ffrench," she repeats, incisively, "shall we go and listen to——"

She pauses. Miss Martinez has suddenly drawn her hands away, and turned resolutely from her lover. In turning from him, she turns to them. She sees them—him—stands, and lets them approach.

"My dear Miss Martinez," says the bright voice of little

Mrs. De Vigne, "let me make two of my most especial friends acquainted—let me present to you Colonel Ffrench."

Vera looks at him—fully, steadily. Instinctively he holds out his hand—she does not seem to see it.

"I have met Colonel Ffrench before," she says, in a voice as steady as her look. All that Dora has told her, all her outraged woman's pride, all the words of that fatal letter of long ago, rise and burn in passionate pride within her. She would rather fall dead here where she stands than let him see his presence has power to move her.

His hand drops by his side—they turn as by one impulse, and move on together. But in dead silence, until Mrs. De Vigne, pulling herself up with an effort, breaks out with a sort of gasp, to fill up the awful hiatus. No one knows what she says—it is doubtful if she does herself. Only she is saying something—this blank silence is quite too horrid. Where is Sir Beltran Talbot? She glances behind—he has disappeared. She looks at Miss Martinez—her face is marble in the pale shimmer of the moon. She turns to the Cuban colonel—*his* has set itself in an expression of invincible resolve. Something wrong here, something seriously wrong—she is playing gooseberry—she will get away, and let them have it out by themselves. Some guests approach—a word of apology, and she is gone. Then he turns to her.

"Vera!"

"Colonel Ffrench!"

Her eyes flash out upon him, but despite the fire of her eyes, two words kept in a refrigerator for a year could not be more thoroughly iced.

"You are about to leave England?"

"The day after to-morrow—yes."

"I wish to see you before you go—I *must* see you!" he says, in a tone that makes a second flash leap from the Southern eyes; "I must see you alone. Here is your sister. At what hour to-morrow may I call?"

"You take a remarkably authoritative tone, do you not, Colonel Ffrench? However, as I have a few words to say to you in turn—if you call at four to-morrow you will find me at home."

She turns swiftly to Mrs. Fanshawe, bows slightly and for the first time, and so leaves him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"O, WE FELL OUT, I KNOW NOT WHY."

A QUIET scene—a pretty picture. A handsomely appointed parlor, the too ardent afternoon sun shine shut out, a young lady sitting alone. She sits in a low chair, the absolute repose of her manner telling of intense absorption—her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes fixed on the door. She wears black—a trailing black silk up to the throat, down to the wrists, that falls with the soft *frou-frou* dear to the feminine heart, whenever she moves, unlit by rose, or ribbon, or gem. It is that consummation, so impossible to attain except by the very rich—elegant simplicity.

She has been waiting here for ten minutes. There is always something in waiting, in expectation that makes the heart beat; Vera's heart is going like a trip-hammer, her eyes excitedly gleam; she is bracing herself for the most trying ordeal of her life. It moves her to the very depths of her being, but it simply must be, and she is wise enough in her two-and-twenty years to know the folly of fighting Fate.

Perhaps of all the trying positions in which a woman can be placed—and life holds many—there can never be any so thoroughly humiliating and crushing, as the knowledge that she has been forced upon the acceptance of a man who does

not want her. To Vera it is a clear case. She has been guilty of a foolish fondness for a man who gave her in return, the sort of amused regard he might give the gambols of a kitten, but who, forced by his friends and his own overdone sense of chivalry, has married her.

And now he is here; he comes to-day to plead for his legal freedom that he may marry that "some one" in Cuba, and she must stand and listen to the cruelest, most humbling words that ever were spoken by man to woman!

A tap—Félician gently opens the door.

"Colonel Ffrench, mademoiselle," she announces, and goes.

Vera starts up. He stands before her, and something she might have thought wistful pleading, if seen in other eyes, looks at her out of his. He holds out his hand.

"*Vera!*" he says, in a tone that matches the look.

She makes a rapid gesture and passes him, and once more his hand falls. She is excited as she has never been excited before in her life. She trembles through all her frame, so that she has to lay hold of the low marble mantel for support. Her voice, when she speaks, is not like the voice of Vera.

"Oh, wait!" she says, in a breathless way, "give me time. I know what you have come to say, but wait—wait one moment. Listen to me first. It has all been a mistake—from first to last, a mistake that can never be set right, but I am not so much to blame—so much—to——"

She breaks, words will not come, the words she wishes to say. She tries to catch her breath to stop the rapid beating of her heart.

"Oh!" she cries out, "what must you have thought of me in that past time—what must you think of me to-day! How bad, how bold—Colonel Ffrench!" She turns to him, passionately, and holds forth both hands, "for Heaven's sake try to believe me if you can! All Mrs. Charlton said to you that day was false—false every word. It seems hard to cred

it, I know, but, indeed, indeed, indeed, when I went to you that evening, when I staid with you that night, I had no thought, no wish, that you—would—make me your—wife!"

The words that nearly stifle her are out. She turns from him again, and bows her face on the hands that clasp the marble. In all her life it seems to her she can never suffer again the pain, the shame she suffers in this hour.

For Colonel Ffrench he stands and looks at her. The whole scene, her excited manner, her rapid words, seem literally to have taken away his breath. Is this the dignified, haughty, self-possessed princess of last night—this passionately-speaking woman, shaken like a reed by the storm of feeling within her? He simply stands mute; he has expected something so entirely different, and looks and listens like a man in a dream.

"You defended me from my enemy, I know," goes on Vera, still in that agitated voice; "every word of that interview is stamped on my remembrance. It was like you—you would have done it for any one maligned. She wronged me—try and believe me when I say she wronged me cruelly. I went in all innocence that night, try and believe that too, with no thought in my child's heart but that you were suffering and alone, and that—I liked you so much. And from that hour, until I sat and listened to Mrs. Charlton, no thought of the actual truth ever crossed my mind. Dora told me nothing—nothing that was true. Neither did you. Oh! Richard Ffrench, neither did you! She told me you wished to marry me before you went away, that you—how shall I say it?—cared for me as men care for the girls they marry. And I believed her, and was glad; how am I to deny it? and I wrote you that poor, foolish, fatal letter, and you came, and in spite of your coldness, your gloom, I never read the truth. Until Mrs. Charlton spoke I knew nothing, and then—Heaven help me—I knew all!"

She catches her breath with a dry, husky sob, and stops for

a moment. Her hands are locked in their grasp to a tension of pain. It seems to her that if she lets go her hold she will turn dizzy and fall.

"You went away," she hurries on, "and I was alone, and had time to think. Your letter came, but I would not read it—then. I laid it away, and waited until the muddle would grow clearer. Time might have soothed and softened even what I felt then, if something else had not come. That something else was a letter of yours. Colonel Ffrench, do you recall a letter you wrote to Mr. Charlton just after my acceptance of you? In that letter you spoke your mind—how, overpowered by the tears and reproaches of Miss Lightwood, to save my honor, to shield me from the consequences of my own act, you would marry me, although you knew that marriage to be utter folly and insanity—although I would be an incubus to you for life. I remember it all—so well! so well! I found it among some papers given me by Dora to read. Mrs. Charlton's surmise might be false or true—that mattered little; but I held in my hand that day your own thoughts, your own words, and knew at last, for the first time, the full extent of the dreadful mistake that had been made. If you had but told me—if Dora had but told me! You were my friend, she my sister—but you would not. I was a child, I know, but I would have understood, and the sacrifice might have been spared. Colonel Ffrench, *your* life may have been spoiled by a forced marriage, but tell me, if you can, what do you think of mine?"

He cannot speak if he would, but she gives him no time. Carried away by the excitement of all she has hidden so long, she is unconscious that he has spoken but one word—her name—since he has entered; that he still stands mute and motionless, borne down by the whirlwind of her passion of grief and regret. That rainy twilight is before her—she is back at Charlton, with the wind tossing the trees, the shine of the rain on the lamp-lit flags. Dora in her trailing crape

and sables, and small, pale face, and she herself a wan, forlorn little figure enough, in the recess of the window, reading that cruelest letter, it seems to her, that ever man wrote.

"Well," she says, "all that is past. What is done is done; your wife you made me, your wife I am. But, Richard Ffrench, as I stand here, I would give my heart's blood to blot out that day—a hundred lives, if I had them, to be free once more!"

He makes no sign; he still stands hat in hand, and listens and looks.

"I liked you in the past, in those Charlton days. Oh! I know it well; as a child may like, with no thought of love or marriage, so hear me Heaven, any more than if I had been six instead of sixteen. Dora spoke—you were silent, and I consented to marry you. You thought I was in love with you, and you pitied me; I had endangered my reputation for your sake, and you made me your wife. But, Colonel Ffrench, listen here! I was not in love with you, either then, or ever, or now—there have been times when it has been in my heart to hate you since, as it is in my heart to hate you as you stand before me now. You did me a cruel wrong when you made me your wife, and, as I say, I would lay down my life gladly, willingly, this hour to be free!"

She has never intended to say this, to go so far, but the force of excitement that shakes her, carries her away. She sees his face turn slowly from its clear, sunburned brown to a dead, swarthy white, which makes her draw back, even while she speaks.

"Understand me," she says, in a steadier voice, "I knew you meant well, honorably, chivalrously, but, as I tell you, it was a mistake, a cruel, dreadful, irreparable mistake. No, not irreparable—my sister tells me otherwise, and if the law will give you back freedom, take it! *then* indeed I may learn to forgive and forget. As I said to you when I came

in, I think I know why you have asked for this interview—what it is you wish to say, but do not say it—I would rather not hear. Dora has told me all that is necessary for me to know. For the rest, I wish you well and happy, but after to-day I see no reason why we should ever meet again. We have managed to spoil each other's lives—if you can set your own life right, no one will rejoice more than I. But whatever the future may bring you, Colonel Ffrench, let it bring you other thoughts of me than those you must have had in the past. Think of me no longer as a girl who cared for you so much that she forgot modesty and delicacy and ran after you wherever you went; but think of me as a poor, ignorant child, who knew no better than to like the gentleman who was kind to her, and tried to amuse her, and who never knew there could be harm or shame in that liking. Think of me as I am—so ashamed of that past, so sorry, so humbled, that never for one hour is the sickening memory absent from me. Think of me as a woman who would give you back your freedom by the sacrifice of her life, if she dared—as a woman whose own existence is marred and darkened by that insane marriage. Let us meet no more, let us speak of it no more. Our ways lie apart—let us say good-by, here, now and forever."

She turns from him as she says it, still hurried, breathless scarcely knowing what she does. He makes no answer, he makes no attempt to, he makes no effort to set himself right—the rush of her rapid words has carried him away as on a torrent. But the picture she makes as she stands there, is with him to the last day of his life—beautiful, impassioned, erect, noble, vindicating her womanhood, a memory to be with him when he dies.

As she turns to go, another door opens, Dora comes in, and stands stricken mute on the threshold, a gorgeous little vision, all salmon-pink, silk, and pearls. He glances at her a second, then looks back, but in that glance Vera is gone.

CHAPTER IX.

CHARLTON PLACE.

OCTOBER. The yellow after-light of a lovely day lingers over the world, glints through the brown boles of the maples and hemlocks, burning deep ruby and bright orange in their autumn dress; flashes away yonder in a million ripples and stars of light on the mirror-like bay, and turns the western windows of Charlton Place into sparks of fire. Charlton in its fall splendor of rubies, and russets, and yellows, and browns, as we saw it once before with Dora Charlton and Vera Ffrench sitting beneath its waving trees. Six years, with their numberless changes, have come and gone since then, and the sisters are here once more, with life wearing a newer, sadder, stranger face for each. Those six years have changed Vera into a beautiful woman, wise with the wisdom that is twin sister to sorrow, with a wearier light in the large, dark eyes, a graver sweetness in the smile than of old. Those six years have changed Dora unutterably for the worst—harder, colder, more selfish, more wordly beyond measure she is than even the hard, selfish little woman who made herself Robert Charlton's wife. Robert Charlton lies, with folded hands and the daisies above him, over in St. Jude's church-yard, a monument of granite and gilt bearing him down, and setting forth, in glowing record, his virtues. Dora is the wife of another man—a man who never, at his best, was worthy to tie the latchet of Robert Charlton's shoes. At his best if a man thoroughly shallow conceited, and vain can ever have any best. Two years and a half the husband of the rich Mrs. Charlton have left him at his worst. Dora's greatest enemy could hardly wish her a

more wretched fate than is hers as Dane Fanshawe's wife. If Richard Ffrench had ever desired retributive justice to befall the little usurper who stands in his place and rules it at Charlton, he need but look at her as she paces up and down her room this October evening, waiting for the sound of carriage wheels that will tell her her husband has come. Her small face, pale at all times, is bluish in its pallor now; the rich dinner-dress, of black lustreless silk and velvet, that trails after her, increases that pallor; her blue eyes flash with that lurid light of rage blue eyes only can flash; her lips are set; her little hands are clenched.

"The villain!" she breathes. "The scoundrel! the liar! the forger! After all I have done for him—all he has made me suffer—the position in life he has attained through me—to return me *this!* Oh, I hate him! I wish I had been dead before I ever married him! But I will desert him—I will tell him so this very night! He shall learn whether I am to be robbed and outraged in this way with impunity!"

She clenches her hand more viciously over a crushed paper she holds, and walks excitedly up and down the room. Now and then she puts her hand over her heart, as a sharp spasm catches her breath. Oh! these spasms, daily increasing, daily growing sharper—harder to bear. Is it not enough to be a martyr to them, to feel with an awful thrill of horror that at any moment one of these spasms of the heart may stop that heart's beating forever? Is not this enough that she must also bear the endless misery and wrong inflicted upon her by her heartless husband? If she only did not care for him! But is it not in the spaniel nature of woman to love best the hand that strikes hardest? And she knows she cares for him—that she could not leave him if she would, in spite of infidelity, coldness, indifference, slight—or may it be said, because of them? She cares for him, and that is why the blows fall so bitter and hard to bear. It is only those we love who have power to wound our hearts. Others may stab our

vanity, our *amour propre*, but love no one and the whole world combined will never break your heart. She is in the white heat of rage just now, and in that rage is capable of saying and doing pretty much anything; so the lookout that awaits Mr. Dane Fanshawe is not a pleasant one, did he but know it. He is used to warm receptions, though not in the endearing sense, and the knowledge that he richly deserves every rating he gets, and a good many he does not get, enables him to endure them with philosophy. Indeed, this gentleman is a philosopher, or nothing. There is nothing new, and nothing true, and it doesn't signify, and it is the Song of the Wife, the world over, this tune Dora loves to sing. He is a Sybarite, and never lets life's rose-leaves crumple beneath him if he can; worry glides off his mind as dew off a cabbage-leaf, never a drop sinks in. It is one of his principles, and about the only principle he is conscious of.

Two months have passed since the return of the Dane Fanshawes and Miss Martinez from their prolonged European sojourn—two months spent alternately at Newport and in New York. Mrs. Fanshawe left Newport in haste, because Mr. Fanshawe became suddenly and violently *epris* of a certain dashing young widow of two-and-twenty, which gay little fisher of men netted all alike, married or single. They spent September in New York, and the transition realized the truth of the old saw—"out of the frying pan into the fire." Mr. Fanshawe's excesses were simply maddening to Mr. Fanshawe's wife. The green-eyed monster laid hold of Dora's poor little heart, go where she would, and never—let it be said for Mr. Fanshawe—never once without good, solid, substantial reason. The latest reason was a popular opera-bouffe *prima-donna*, substantial in the sense that she weighed well on to two hundred avoirdupois. The bracelets, diamond rings, bouquets, and poodles—this last melodious luxury had a passion for poodles—that found their way to Mlle. Lalage's hotel, and that Dora's money paid for, would have driven

Dora mad had she known it. What she did know was, that Mr. Fanshawe lived at the rate of about twenty thousand dollars a year, and that even the Charlton ducats would not hold out forever with a double, treble, fourfold drain upon them. The paper she holds in her hand to-day is the last straw that breaks the camel's back—it is a forged check for the sum of five thousand dollars, and Dora is white with passion to the very lips. Large as her income is, she lives beyond it—doubly beyond it, as Mr. Fanshawe draws upon her. She dresses herself and Vera superbly, she denies herself no pleasure, no luxury that money can buy; but if the forged check system begins, before five years more she will be as she was in the Dora Lightwood days—penniless. And it seems to her now, after these years of wealth, that sooner than go back to that phase of existence, she would glide quietly out of life in a double dose of morphine.

Hark! Carriage-wheels at last, driving as Mr. Fanshawe drives always, recklessly fast. She pauses in her walk, her eyes glittering with passionate excitement, and waits and listens. She was ill when he went up to New York two days ago—surely common decency will send him first of all to her side. But common decency and Dane Fanshawe long ago shook hands and parted—he does *not* come to his wife. She hears him run upstairs whistling cheerily, pass on to his own rooms quite at the other end of the passage, and the door close after him with a bang. She waits two, four, ten minutes, then patience ceases to be a virtue. She flings wide her door, and raises her voice—always of unsuitable compass for her small body, and shriller now and more piercing than ever, sharpened as its edge is by anger.

"Mr. Fanshawe."

"My angel!" promptly and pleasantly comes the response. Mr. Fanshawe knows better than to feign deafness when Mrs. Fanshawe calls in *that* tone. His door opens, he stands half divested of his dusty travelling suit just within it.

"Come here, if you please," commands Dora in a voice that would go very well with a box in the ear, and to tell the truth it is the very endearment Dora's little fist is tingling to administer.

Mr. Fanshawe looks in plaintive appeal from his wife to his dishabille.

"My angel," he murmurs, "if you *could* wait, although I know you won't, until I have had a bath, and dressed for——"

"Never mind your dress. Such wedded lovers as we are need not stand on the order of their costume surely. Come here at once."

"Now I wonder what is the latest indictment," says Mr. Fanshawe to himself with a gentle sigh, but obeying. "My lady looks as if the jury had found a true bill."

He enters his wife's room, deprecatingly, submissively. If a few gentle looks, a few pleasant words, even a few off-hand husbandly caresses will soothe her down, he is willing, most willing, more than willing indeed, to administer them. They cost so little, and he has known them to go so far. Like penny buns, they are cheap, and very filling at the price Fine words may not, as a rule, butter parsnips, but from a neglectful husband to a weak-minded wife they do wonders Mr. Fanshawe has tried their power and knows. So he gives Dora a pleasant look, a pleasant little smile, and holds out his hand to draw her to him. But Dora waves him off and back, standing like a small, furious, tragedy-queen in her sweeping silks and velvet, and thread lace, her blue eyes alight with rage, her little figure quivering in the intensity of its passion. Her husband has done as much, and more than this, many a time before, but she is smarting under a long course of slight and wrong, and pain and affront, and this is just the last drop in a brimming cup. He sees that it is a hopeless case, the coming tornado is not to be averted; so, with a gentle regretful sigh, he sinks wearily into the softest chair

the room contains. There is to be a scene; it is inevitable. Poor soul! it is her greatest failing, this tendency to make scenes. They bore him horribly; reproaches tire him; and it is so foolish of poor Dora, too, for they do no good; they never by any possibility *can* do good, and it is bad for her health and everything. He really wonders at her. It would be so much more pleasant all round, if she would but take things easily. He never finds fault with *her*. What is it now? Can his having escorted Mlle. Lalage to Rockaway yesterday, and given her those diamond ear-rings, have come to——

Mrs. Fanshawe saves him all further surmise. She holds out the crumpled paper, in a blaze of wrath.

"Dane Fanshawe!" she cries; "do you see this?"

The question is pertinent, for Mr. Fanshawe lies back in his soft chair, his handsome blonde head lying against its azure silk back, his handsome blue eyes closed, apparently sinking gently into sweetest slumber. But at this ringing question he looks up.

"That, my love?" He deliberately puts up his eye-glass, and inspects it. "Well, really, you know, one piece of paper looks so much like another, that——"

"It is your forged check for five thousand dollars!"

"Ah!" says Mr. Fanshawe, and drops his glass. "Yes, the forged check." He looks his wife steadily, quietly, deliberately, in the eyes. "Yes," he says again, "it *has* a familiar look, now that I see it more closely. Well my love," —a sneer, devilish in its calm, cold-blooded malignity— "what are you going to do about it?"

She lays her hand on her heart, and stands panting, looking at him. One of these ghastly twinges has just grasped her, her lips turn blue, her breath comes brokenly; she absolutely cannot speak, so deadly is her anger.

He sits and regards her unmoved, his face hardening slowly until for all feeling it shows, it might be a handsome

mask of white stone. Not one faintest touch of compassion for the woman before him moves him. An evil life has thoroughly brutalized and hardened him; under all his soft, society languor, half real, half affected, there is the pitiless heart of a tiger.

"This—this is all you have to say," she gasps.

"All," says Mr. Fanshawe, and watches her unflinchingly.

His hard, pitiless gaze, something in the cold, cruel steadiness of his face frightens her—appalls her. She realizes for the first time that she is talking to a man of flint—that beneath those sleepy blue eyes, that low *trainante* voice, that silken smile, their is neither heart to feel, soul to pity, nor conscience to know remorse. Her hands drop; for the first time she has found her master. In all their marital battles hitherto she has stormed on to the end, and he has listened, bored, wearied, but resigned. "I have drank the wine—I must take the lees," his patient silence has said.

But this is different—something, she cannot define what, in his face, in his eyes, turns her cold with a slow, creeping sense of fear. She shrinks from him and turns without a word. There is a blank, thrilling pause. Not even when she goes to the window and looks out does he avert that basilisk stare. For Dora—her transport of rage is gone, the whole world seems dropping away from under her feet. She is realizing, in a strange, appalled sort of way, that this man, nearer and more to her than any other human being on earth, is a villain, and a villain without one redeeming trait of love or pity for herself. Heaven help the wife to whom this truth comes home—good or ill she may be—but Heaven help her in that hour, for help on earth there can be none.

"Is this the end?" asks the deliberate voice of Mr. Fanshawe, at last. "May I go and dress, or has more got to be said?"

"Go!" she answers, in a stifled voice, "and I pray Heaven I may never see your bitter, bad face again."

She covers her own with her hands, crushed as he has never seen her crushed in their married life before. She sinks down on her knees by the bed, and hides her white, quivering face upon it. For him, he rises and stands gazing down upon her, not one trace of the hard malignity leaving him.

"Listen to me," he says, "*I* have a word or two to say, and as I don't speak often—in this way—I hope it will have weight. There comes a time in the lives of most men, I suppose, however long-suffering, when curtain-lectures fall and conjugal tirades weary. I have borne them for two years and a half. I decline to bear them longer. I married you for your money—you are listening, I hope, Mrs. Fanshawe?—and you know it, or if you do not, the fault is your own. It was not worth while to try double-dealing; I never strove to deceive you, or—if you will pardon me—to win you. I married you for your money, and your money I mean to spend, if not by fair means, why, then by foul. I asked you for one thousand dollars a week ago; you refused, and were abusive, according to your amiable custom. I said nothing; I took the easier plan—I went and drew the money. I am disposed to be agreeable myself; I like peace, and pleasant smiles, and friendly words, and I mean to have them—if not at home, why, then abroad. If you raged till the day of doom you could not change me or my intentions one iota. It is foolish on your part—it is telling on you, my angel; you are growing prematurely old and disagreeably thin—scraggy, indeed, I may say—and if there is one creature on this earth I abhor it is a thin woman. Take my advice, Mrs. Fanshawe—it is the first time I have proffered it, it shall be the last—while we live together let us sign a treaty of peace. What I am I intend to remain. Money I must and will have; amusement I must and will have also. The

check I admit. It is the first time; if you loosen your purse-strings a little, it may be the last. Pardon me for having inflicted this long speech upon you, but a man *must* strike in self-defense. Are you quite sure you have no more to say? I am going."

She makes a gesture, but does not speak—a gesture so full of stricken despair that it might have moved him, but it does not. There is absolutely a smile on his lips as he turns to go. He is victor.

"A new version of the 'Taming of the Shrew,'" he thinks. "Poor soul! she dies hard, but it will do her good in the end."

"He ain't never a comin' back I s'pose. Yer don't know nothin' 'bout him, do yer? Yer hain't never seen him nowhere, have yer? It's powerful lonesome—oh! lordy, powerful lonesome—sence Cap'n Dick went away."

It is Daddy who thus delivers himself. He stands shuffling from one foot to the other, as if the sand burned him, twisting his old felt hat between his hands, his dull, protruding eyes fixed wistfully on the lady who sits on the grass. She looks up, lifting two lovely, soft, dark, tender eyes to his face.

"No, Daddy," she answers; "I am afraid—I don't think he is ever coming back."

Her eyes wander from his face, and look far away across the gold and rose light of the sunset. Those large dark eyes have as wistful a light, as pathetic a meaning, as poor Daddy's own, and she stretches out one dusk, slim hand, with brilliants lighting in, and touches gently the grimy one of the "softy."

"You are sorry?" she says softly.

"Oh! ain't I just!" responds Daddy with a burst. "Lor! how I *hev* gone and missed him. Why, lordy! it seems like a hundred years sence he went away. I ain't had the life of a dog sence then. He was good to me, he was," says Daddy,

drawing one grimy sleeve across his eyes; "he was most awful good to me allers."

"Poor fellow!" Vera says, with a pity deeper than Daddy can comprehend.

"I ain't had no peace o' my life ever sence," he goes on, crying, and smearing his dirty sleeve across his dirty face. "I'm kicked about, and half starved most the time, and took up the rest. I'm took up so continiwal," cries Daddy, "for wagrancy and no wisible means o' s'port, that I a'most wishes they would keep me took up altogether. Nobody's never good to me now anymore, and he was—oh, he was most uncommon! And he ain't never a comin' back no more?"

"No more," Vera repeats. "Oh, Daddy, no more!" And then she, too, breaks down, and for a while there is silence. She sits on a green knoll just above the shore, the long marsh grass, and rank flame-colored flowers, nodding about her, the sea wind blowing her dark, loose hair as she sits, her hat on her lap. At her feet stretches away the long dreary sweep of sand dune, before her lies Shaddeck Bay with the amber glitter of the sunset in it, to the left Shaddeck Light, falling sun-brown and wind-beaten, to rottenness and decay. To the right lies St. Ann's, a few sounds of life coming from it faint and far off—the rumble of a passing cart over the still streets quite audible here. Boats glide about with the red glare on their sails. Daddy lingers near, ugly, dirty, ragged, as unpicturesque an object as eye could see, with a handful of currency in his pocket, and wondering admiration for the beauty of the lady before him, staring vaguely in his untutored, masculine soul. She looks up with a start from her reverie at last.

"I won't detain you any longer," she says, gently. "Remember, whenever you are in trouble, or in want come to me. Do not be afraid. I will see you always, help you always. I intend to find you a home somewhere; you shall be starved and beaten no longer, my poor, poor Daddy! *H.*

was good to you—I cannot take his place, but I will do what I can."

"Thanky," Daddy says, with a last wipe of the coat-sleeve across the bleared eyes. "Yes, he were most uncommon good to me, he were."

So he shambles away, and Vera sits still a long time, her eyes full of fathomless pain and regret. It is a month nearly since their return to Charlton—a week since that interview between Mr. and Mrs. Fanshawe, of which Dora has *not* told her. Dora has been strangely quiet since that time. Mr. Fanshawe has fluctuated between New York and St. Ann's in his usual inconsequent fashion, and Mrs. Fanshawe has compressed her lips ominously, and said nothing. Perhaps she has an object in view, her birthday is near—her thirty-third, alas! She gives a large party, the house is filled already with guests from New York, others are coming, the "first families" of St. Ann's are bidden, Mrs. Fanshawe means to outdo Mrs. Fanshawe. And she determines her husband shall be present.

It is the rarest of rare things for Mr. Fanshawe to grace his wife's festivities. No one is more rarely seen at Charlton than its nominal master; but on her birthday he must, he shall be present. The world is beginning to talk of their connubial infelicity, ladies to smile and shrug their shoulders, and comment after the usual charitable fashion of the sex. What would you? She is fully six years his senior; she looks fully six years older than she is; she is faded, soured, sickly, peevish, jealous; and gentlemen, you know, will be gentlemen, etc., etc. He never cared for her, he married her for her money—he admits it; no one ever sees him with her; no one ever meets him at Charlton. And they do say he and Lalage—dreadful creature!—are out in the park every fine afternoon, and that he drives four-in-hand with the coaching-club to High Bridge, Lalage beside him on the box, smoking cigarettes all the way.

Dora knows it all, and sets her small teeth in impotent anger and despair. But he shall attend her birthday ball—common decency requires that. She has asked him calmly, with forced composure, and he has assented carelessly.

"Oh, yes; of course; that will be all right; he will be on hand. The twenty-second or twenty-seventh—which is it? He has the deuce and all of a memory for dates."

He pulls out a little betting-book, and looks at her with his pleasant smile. Dora's lip quivers; she is strangely subdued those last few days, and is looking wretchedly ill.

"The twenty-third," she answers, and turns from him abruptly. There are husbands who remember their wives' birthdays, and their wedding-days, and such domestic foolish anniversaries, but Mr. Dane Fanshawe is not of their order. Still he makes a memorandum of it, and that night asks his wife for more money.

Her eyes flash, but she retains her calm. She has no money to spare. They have been horribly extravagant; she has purchased a diamond collar, and this party is costing enormously. It is quite impossible. She looks up at him inflexibly as she says it. He smiles slightly, returns her look, and moves away, humming a tune.

Vera sits on her grassy seat, and watches the crimson, and scarlet, and orange splendor of the sunset fade into pink, and primrose, and fleecy white, then into pallid gray, slowly lit and gemmed with golden stars. The gray deepens to gloom; a chill night-wind rises, a cold, sad sigh from the great Atlantic. The tide ebbs away, and the long, black bar is bare—that bar over which she walked to Shaddeck Light and Richard Ffrench. How lonely is the night, and the sea, and the stars!—the night with its long, low, lamentable wind! the sea with its mighty monotone, its deep, eternal, melancholy plaint! the stars so far off in their tremulous, mysterious beauty! "The stars were called, and they said, 'We are here,' and they shone forth with gladness to Him who made

them.' Something stirs in Vera's heart with a great and solemn thrill—after all, one may live for others, and to win a place beyond these golden clusters, even when one's own life has come to an end.

Where is Richard Ffrench? Vera does not know. She has neither heard from him, nor of him, since that summer afternoon in London. He is in Cuba, perhaps—fighting once more, or wounded, or ill, or dead. She knows nothing. She reads all the Cuban news, but she never sees his name. Of what followed after her interview, between him and Dora, she does not know. Dora has never said, she has never asked. What does it matter? All is dead and done with, the story is over, the book is closed, her romance is ended; there is nothing left but to begin again, with all life's sweetest possibilities shut out.

Darkness closes down, darkness braided with sparkling stars. The sea lies a great, sighing, black mystery; the wind has the icy breath of coming winter in its sweep. Shaddeck Light is only a darker shadow among the shadows, desolate, forsaken, forlorn—something to shudder at. How strange to think she ever spent a night there; no one will ever spend a night there again. She rises, chill in the frosty wind, puts on her hat, wraps her shawl about her, and turns to go home. Dora's guests will miss her, and her life belongs to Dora now.

Poor little Dot! how sorry she is for her—how thin and worn she grows—how frightfully frequent are those terrible heart-pangs. It is all she can do not to hate Dane Fanshawe—this cruel, smiling, suave fine gentleman, who breaks his wife's heart as coolly and with as little compunction as he shoots a sea-gull. In every human face there lies latent a look of cruelty—circumstances may or may not bring it out, but it is there—in his, though, more markedly than in most. But she is powerless—it is simply one of the things that *must* be left alone—the less said to Dora the better. He is always

especially attentive and deferential to herself—she is a young and handsome woman, and she is *not* his wife. What a tremendous puzzle life is—the truth comes well home to Miss Martinez this evening, as she flutters swiftly homeward in the black night breeze—hard to enter, harder to live through, and hardest of all to end!

The house is all lit when she draws near, its whole front sparkling with light. She enters and passes upstairs to her room. Every one is dressing for dinner—it is a full-dress ceremonial every day now, and then there follows the long evening in the drawing-room, with music, and flirtation, and carpet dances, and cards. Vera wearies of it all, not that life has grown a bore, or pleasure begun to pall, but satiety does beget disgust. She taps at Dora's door on her way.

"Come in," says Dora's voice.

Vera enters, and stands in wonder.

What is the matter with Dot? There is a fierce, wild fire in her eyes, her pale face is excited, she sits writing rapidly at her desk. A buff envelope lies on the floor, a paper—a telegram near it.

"Read that," Dora says.

She spurns with her foot the paper, and writes on. Vera stoops and picks it up. It is from Mr. Fanshawe, and is dated Philadelphia.

"Cannot come on twenty-third. Must manage the high jinks without me. Obliged to go to Baltimore. Wish you many happy returns all the same.

"DANE FANSHAWE."

Vera drops the telegram as if it had stung her; she knows how Dora has set her heart on his being present at the ball.

"Oh, this is too bad, too bad!" she cries out.

Dora looks up; to the last day of her life Vera never forgets that look, nor the slow, weird, icy smile that goes with it.

"Lalage is in Philadelphia," she says.

"Dot!"

"He has gone after her. How do I know? I have employed a detective!"

She laughs aloud at her sister's start and look of consternation—Dora's wild, eldrich laugh.

"A detective, my dear; it has come to that. The telegram has just arrived; here is my answer. Read it."

Vera takes it, stupefied.

"As you have gone with that woman, stay with her. Come here no more. I will never live with you again, so help me God!"

An hour later Mrs. Fanshawe sits among her guests, beautifully dressed, painted, perfumed, smiling, radiant with life and pleasure. Her shrill laugh rings out, oftener and shriller than any one ever has heard it before.

"What a very dissonant laugh Mrs. Fanshawe's is?" one sensitive lady says, shrinkingly, "and how wildly her eyes glisten. I hope she does not use opium."

Vera sits silent, pale, frightened, distressed. And far away, as strange a message, perhaps, as ever flashed over the wires, is speeding on its lightning course to Mr. Dane Fanshawe.

CHAPTER X.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

IT is the night of the birthday-ball, a dark, windy, overcast night, threatening rain. The Charlton mansion is ablaze with light, from attic to cellar all is bustle, preparation, expectation. In their rooms, the guests of the house are dressing. In hers sits the mis-

tress—she whose natal day all the splendor of to-night is to honor.

Félician is busily and skilfully at work; the result is to surpass every previous effort.

"Make me young and pretty to-night, Félician," her mistress cries, with a gay laugh, "if you never do it in your life again!"

And Félician is doing her best. The golden hair is frizzed, and puffed, and curled, and banded in a wonderful and bewildering manner to the uninitiated. Not much of all that glittering *chevelure dorée* grows on Dora Fanshawe's head, but who besides Félician is to know that? Her dress is one of Worth's richest and rarest—a dream of azure silk and embroidered pink rosebuds, point lace more costly than rubies, and diamonds—such diamonds as will not flash in her rooms to-night.

She wears brilliants in a profusion indeed that is almost barbaric—they flash on her fingers and arms—woefully thin arms, that it requires all Félician's skill to drape so that their fragility may not show; they sparkle in her ears, in her hair, and run like a river of light round her neck. But her blue eyes outshine them; they are filled with a streaming light, her cheeks are flushed, her dry lips are fever red.

"Make me pretty to-night, Félician—make me young and pretty to-night!" is again and again her cry, until even Félician looks at her in wonder.

Perhaps after all the hint of the lady last night concerning opium is not entirely without foundation. She is in a state of half delirious excitement, she hardly feels the floor beneath her—she seems to float on buoyant air.

Life looks all rose-color and radiance—pain, poverty shame, sorrow, things blotted out of the world. She is in the dawn of a new life, she is on the verge of a complete revolution of all that has hitherto made up her existence

No one is old at three and thirty; Ninon de l'Enclos won hearts at eighty, notably her own grandson's among them; and she is still pretty—where are the crow's feet, and the bluish pallor of cheeks and lips to-night? No one shall spoil her pleasure, no one shall darken her life; freed from Dane Fanshawe, she will begin anew, and eat, drink, and be merry, and hold black care and blue devils at bay forevermore!

The sound of singing reaches her, it comes softly and sweetly from Vera's room. Vera dresses always with a rapidity little short of miraculous in Mrs. Fanshawe's eyes. It is only on the sad side of thirty, that women stand for wistful hours before their mirrors, gazing ruefully on what they see. Dora has an innate, inborn, ingrained passion for dress; Vera forgets what she wears five minutes after it is on. Her sweet, fresh, young voice comes from across the corridor to Mrs. Fanshawe's ears.

> "Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!
> Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.
> Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.
>
> "No light had we, for that we do repent;
> And learning this the bridegroom will relent.
> Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now."

It is the song of the Foolish Virgins. There is profound pathos in the words as Vera sings them. Dora lifts her eyes to a picture that hangs on a wall opposite, a picture she has brought from Florence, and that tells the same mournful story her sister sings. It is a weird, melancholy thing enough, but it has struck Mrs. Fanshawe's capricious fancy. It is a night scene; the "blackness of darkness" shrouds the sky like a pall, and faintly through that dense gloom you catch the shadowy outline of a fair white mansion—faint gleams of light coming from its closed portals. Outside that closed door the shadowy forms of women crouch—the whole picture indeed is shadowy and indistinct, in distorted positions of

suffering and despair. Their unlit lamps hang from their nerveless hands, their faces are shrouded in their fallen hair. One alone lifts her face to the rayless night-sky, and a glimmer from the door falls on and lights it. It is a face not easily forgotten; some deadly horror, some awful fear, loss love, laughing—all are in that white, uplifted, tortured face "And The Door Was Shut," is the name of the painting. A singular and spectral sort of picture for a lady's chamber, but it has a fearful sort of a fascination for Dora. She knows that solemn, beautiful story, although she never opens and makes a scoff of the Book wherein it is told. What—she thinks it now, a dread thrill shuddering through all her wild exultation of feeling—what if all that Book tells be true, what if after this life of purple and fine linen, and feasting sumptuously every day, another begins, that tremendous other preachers preach of—of darkness and torment, and the eternal wailing of lost souls? And if there be that other, what place does it hold for all those awful eternal years for such as she?

"No light; so late! and dark and chill the night!"

The sweet pathetic voice comes across the hall again:

"O, let us in that we may find the light!
Too late, too late! Ye cannot enter now.

"Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?
O, let us in, tho' late, to kiss his feet!
No, no, too late! Ye cannot enter now."

Dora's excited nerves cannot bear it. She puts her hands over her ears with a sharp, sudden cry.

"It is horrible! I hate it! Go to Miss Vera's room, Félician, and tell her to stop singing that wretched song, and if she is dressed to come and talk to me here."

* * * * * * *

One hour later. Over the road leading from St. Ann's to

Charlton Place, two men walk, one rapidly, in long, steady strides, the other more slowly, and keeping well out of sight. They are not together—the lagging wayfarer lags purposely to avoid the rapid walker before. It is a lonely road on a sunlit noonday. It is a desolately lonely road on a starless night. The trees nearly meet overhead, beneath is a gulf of darkness. A fine drizzling rain is beginning to fall, a high complaining wind, with a touch of November in its quality, swirls through the tree-tops, and whistles sharply past the ears of the wayfarers. The surf cannonades the shore in dull, heavy booms, and the sun-charged sky gives promise of a wild fall storm before morning.

"Bad for the coasters and the fisher folk," the first pedestrian says to himself, struggling with a fiercer blast than before. "A wild night at Shaddeck Light!"

A wild night at Shaddeck Light—a wild night everywhere, a wild night for belated pedestrians, a wild night for Mrs Fanshawe's guests. But in Mrs. Fanshawe's brilliantly-lit parlors, heavy curtains shut out of sight the blackness, out of hearing the wind. A fine band of music, down from the city, drowns with resonant waltz music the beat of the rain on the glass, and the dash of the surf on the shore. Mrs. Fanshawe, a vision from dreamland or operaland, in her Paris dress and diamonds, her gilded hair and rose-bloom cheeks, receives her guests like a queen. Men look at her, stricken with sudden wonder and admiration—very young men particularly, whose way it is invariably to fall in love with women a dozen years their elder. It is so safe, too, to flutter about this gorgeous moth, who showers smiles on all with dazzling impartiality. "The greatest charm of a married woman is invariably her—husband." Dora Lightwood, *ætat* three-and-thirty, would be a sharp-boned husband-hunter, to be feared and shunned—Dora Fanshawe, married and brilliant, eclipses every young maiden present with her audacious *beauté du diable.* Not one fair virgin of them all—not

stately, dark-eyed Miss Martinez herself, will receive half the adulation to-night that will Dane Fanshawe's neglected wife

The foremost of the two men reaches the open entrance gates, and the strains of the "Beautiful Blue Danube" float out and welcome him. A look of annoyance passes over his face.

"A party," he mutters; "have I come in vain then after all? No!" he adds, suddenly, "let who will be here, I know she will see me."

He draws near the house, bright with illumination, and pauses. The music sinks and swells, flitting forms pass rapidly. He stands irresolute a moment and gazes at the picture. Around him the darkness, the drifting rain, the surging trees, the long lamentable blast, himself, a solitary figure—within there, floods of gas-light, crashes of music, a wilderness of flowers, and the "dancers dancing in tune." The contrast strikes him with a jarring sense of pain, he turns impatiently away, and goes round to the side of the house, with the air of one who knows his locality well. A door stands slightly ajar—he enters a hall, and a woman-servant passing through with a tray of ices stops and stares.

"Can I see Harriet Hart?" he asks. "Is she housekeeper here still?"

"Miss Hart is housekeeper—yes, sir," answers the woman, still staring.

He is a gentleman evidently, also, evidently he is not a guest.

"Who wants Miss Hart?" calls a sharp voice, and Harriet herself appears, superfine in brown silk, a shade or two lighter than her complexion, her little black eyes as sharp, her flat figure flatter, her acrid voice more acrid, if possible, than of old.

The stranger takes off his hat with a smile, and stands revealed. She gives a little shriek and recoil.

"Lord above!" she cries, "Captain Dick!"

"Bad shillings always come back, do they not, Miss Harriet? I see you well, I hope, after all these years?"

She does not reply; she stands silently staring at him, aghast.

"I have given you a shock, I am afraid. It is I in the flesh, I assure you, and no apparition. What is going on—a ball?"

"A birthday-ball—missis' birthday. Good Lord! Captain Dick, what a turn you have given me! Who'd ever a thought it?"

"So it seems," he says, half laughing, half impatient. "It is a mistake, I find, taking people by surprise. We used to be tolerable friends, I believe, but you really do not seem over glad to see me. Well, it is the way of the world, out of sight out of mind."

"It ain't *my* way, though," says Harriet, grimly, and stretches out her hand.

Six years ago, if any corner of Harriet's vestal heart could be said to be bestowed on obnoxious man, bright, debonair, handsome Dick Ffrench, sunny of glance, sunny of smile, gay of voice, dashing of manner, had that corner, and no rival has ousted him since.

"Welcome home, Captain Dick, to the house that ought to call you master instead o' them that ain't fit to wipe your shoes. I'm glad to see ye, and there ain't many men folk on airth Harriet Hart would say *that* to. When did you come?"

"To-night from New York. Harriet," abruptly, "I want to see—Miss Vera."

He pauses before the name, and flushes as he says it. Harriet's sharp, beady black eyes seem to go through his rough overcoat, straight to his spinal marrow, as she stands and transfixes him.

"Yes?" she says, shutting up her thin mouth like a trap "*Miss* Vera!—h-m-m! Mrs. Fanshawe, too?"

"No, Mrs. Fanshawe need not be disturbed. Tell Miss Vera——"

"Come this way," cuts in Harriet, and leads him to her own sitting-room.

It is a cozy apartment, as befits a housekeeper of Miss Hart's temper and long-standing at Charlton. A bright red coal fire burns in the grate, a cat curls up comfortably before it, a rocker sways by the hearth-rug, china dogs and vases are on the mantle, red moreen shuts out the rain-beaten night, and shuts in the glowing fire-lit "interior." A flash of recognition comes into her visitor's eyes as he enters—a flash half pleasure, half pain.

"It is like old times to be here," he says, standing before the fire.

"Ah, old times," responds Harriet. "I wish to goodness gracious mercy old times would come back. We had some peace and comfort of our lives *then*. I'm old myself, and new times don't suit me—lazy fine gentlemen a loafin' about, and chuckin' of the chamber-maids under their sassy chins; cross missises that an angel would have to give warnin' to every other month; eatin' and drinkin' goin' on perpetual from nine in the mornin' to nine at night; a rush o' people fillin' the house and draggin' the help off their feet; wimmin with their clothes hangin' off their bodies, only a strap of lace across their nasty shoulders to keep 'em on; playin' billiards and crookay, and gaddin' about with the men folks, and *they* makin' the whole place beastly with their cigars. Faugh! if it wasn't for Miss Vera, I'd a left long ago."

He lifts his head at the sound of her name; the rest of Harriet's valedictory has been lost.

"Miss Vera," he repeats; "yes, Harriet, tell Miss Vera I am here. Tell her I have come from New York on the eve of my departure for Cuba to see her, and will detain her from her friends but a few moments."

He leans his elbow on the low chimney-piece, and seems

to relapse into reverie. Harriet gives him one last keen glance as she turns to go. Vera is his wife—at least they went to church one day to be married—why then does she not behave as such? It is part and parcel of the new state of things going on at Charlton, of the topsy-turvy sort of life these people lead, dining until nine, dancing until one, breakfasting in bed near noon, married women making eyes at unmarried men, a few of the fastest and friskiest young matrons smoking!

Deep disgust weighs down Harriet's soul, speechless wrath flames upon them out of her needle eyes. Miss Vera is the leaven that lightens the whole mass. *She* never carries on like a skittish young colt in a paddock, *she* never makes a fool of herself and disgraces her sex with these slim-waisted, cigar-smoking, mustached young dandies, who part their hair down the middle, and stare at her (Harriet) as though she were some extinct species of the dodo. But she is a married woman, and she does not live with her husband, thus much she conforms to her world and her order.

Harriet goes to the different doors and scrutinizes the dancers. Scorn inexpressible sits on her majestic Roman nose as she looks at the waltzers—half-dressed waists clasped so closely in black broadcloth arms. She is not there. "For which, oh, be joyful!" says Miss Hart, turning away. Yonder is her missis, looking as if a rainbow and several pink and blue clouds had been cut up to make her gown. "We'd a scorned to put red and blue together in *my* time," she soliloquizes; "we'd better taste." Among all the reeling, swaying, voluptuous-looking throng Mrs. Fanshawe whirls and wheels, the bright, particular star of the night, waltzing as if her feet touched air.

Vera is not here. Harriet visits the music-room, the conservatory, and finds her at last actually sitting out the waltz, talking to a popular poet down from New York, and looking as if she preferred it.

"Miss Vera," in a rasping whisper.

She turns from her long-haired poet with a smile.

"Yes, Harriet," she says, in her gentle way.

"There's a visitor for you; he's in my room, a-waitin' He's down from New York, and wants to see you."

"A visitor," Vera says, in surprise, "for me? Not a guest? Who can it be? It is not," laughing slightly—"it is not Daddy?"

"Daddy!" retorts Harriet, with scorn. "Well! it's the next thing—it's Daddy's master, leastways as was. It's Captain Ffrench."

Vera rises to her feet. She forgets poet and party, she stands confounded and looks at the speaker.

"It is Captain Ffrench—Captain—Dick—Ffrench," says Harriet, tersely, "and he's a-waitin' in my room a purpose to see you. "He wont keep you long; he told me to tell you so, and he's goin' to Cuba, he told me to tell you that, too."

She puts her hand to her head. The shock of surprise is great, but the shock of sudden, intense joy is greater. Colonel Ffrench here! Her heart gives one great, glad bound, and then pulses on, a hundred a minute. It is with something less than the usual high-bred grace and ease, for which Miss Martinez is justly famous, that she turns to her poet and makes her excuses. Then without a word to Harriet she follows her to the door of that lady's boudoir. There Miss Hart unseals her lips.

"He's in there a-waitin'; you don't want me to introduce you, I reckon," she says, with grim humor, and goes.

Vera stands a moment. In that moment a change comes over her; she is the Vera the world knows again. The shock is past; there is no need for her to be glad to see this man. He has mistaken her once, he shall not again. Dora's words return to her; whatever the business that brings him here, it is quite unnecessary that she should show gladness

at his coming, or trouble him with an effusive welcome. There is not a man dancing there in the ball-room who is not as much to her as this man is ever likely to be. She takes herself well in hand, then opens the door and goes in.

He turns quickly. Miss Martinez's taste in dress has the effect always of looking simple, and gives beholders—male beholders—the idea of beauty unadorned. In reality, her wardrobe rivals in expense Dora's own. She wears white to-night—creamy white silk, with ornaments of dull yellow gold, some touches of rich old lace, and a crimson rose in her hair. Her splendid eyes light like brown stars the dusk pallor of her Spanish face. That pallor is deeper than usual, the laces rise and fall with the rebellious beatings of the heart beneath them, but he does not distinguish the pallor, does not hear the heart-beats, so no harm is done.

"This is a very unexpected pleasure," she says, smilingly, and with the instinct of hospitality holds out her hand. "Let me welcome you back to Charlton, Colonel Ffrench."

He holds for a second the slender unresponsive hand, then drops it, and places a chair for her.

"Will you not sit, too?" she asks.

"No," he answers, and resumes his place by the chimney and his former position. She has not said much, but something in her tone, in her eyes, chills him, as the cold night wind sighing about the gables could never do. In her beauty and her pride, her rich dress, the gleam of yellow gold, as she sits in the ruby shine of the fire, she seems so far off, so high above him, that he turns his eyes away with a feeling akin to despair.

He realizes, as he has never realized before, that the Vera of six years ago is as utterly gone out of this world as though the daisies grew over her grave. This beautiful, reticent, graceful, chill-voiced, fine lady, is no more his black-eyed laughing, romping, loving, madcap Vera than——

The brown eyes flash up their golden light suddenly upon him.

"When did you come?" she asks—"from England, I mean?"

"Three days ago."

"I trust you left all our mutual friends very well?"

He turns his eyes, fixed moodily on the fire, with a swift, passionate glance to her face.

"I saw Sir Beltran Talbot before I left!" he says, abruptly.

"Yes?" Her voice does not change, but a faint color rises, and the hand that holds her fan is not quite steady.

"And I know that you refused him. Vera, why?"

She meets his glance steadily—slow, intense surprise and anger in her eyes.

"I decline to answer that question. I deny your right to ask it."

"I claim no right," he says, steadily. "It should be ample enough, Heaven knows; but a right enforced—in this case—would hardly be worth the claiming. Vera, I wonder if any other human being ever changed so utterly in six years as you have done! There is not a trace, not a tone, not a look, of the little Vera of that past summer left."

A smile breaks the proud, set gravity of her face—a smile of triumph.

"You preferred that other Vera?" she says.

He looks at her again, and the story his eyes tell, is the story told since the world began—to be told till the world ends.

"I liked that other Vera," he answers; "I love this!"

She is lying back in the chair; now she sits suddenly erect The words give her an absolute shock. She believes Dora's fiction; she believes implicitly in that "some one" in Cuba; she has never dreamed herself other than a drag on his life, not easily gotten rid of, and now, to hear this!

"In all these years," he goes on, "the image of that other Vera has never left me. I saw her always as I saw her last——"

He stops abruptly at a gesture from her.

"As you saw me last," she repeats slowly. "Yes, neither of us is likely ever to forget *that*."

Some of the old pain, the old humiliation of that day returns to her now across the years. Again she is crouching in the summer-house, her wedding-dress crushed amid the rank weeds and damp grasses, listening to the strident voice that denounces her as a bold creature, lost to all modesty or maidenly pride. A flush passes over her face, a light comes into her angry eyes, her fluttering hands grow steady, her swift heart-beats cease. Some perverse spirit enters into her. If she ever acknowledges to this man, forced to marry her, that she loves him, then she deserves all Mrs. Charlton has said.

"I saw always the little Vera I had left," he goes on—"my dear, little, bright-eyed child-bride; I came back and found her a woman, more beautiful than I had ever thought my little gipsy could be, and from the first hour I knew her I loved her. That she had forgotten me, except as one who stood between her and happiness, I was told, and did not doubt. It seemed natural enough. But I begin to doubt *all* I have heard, some truth there may be, but also many falsehoods. You refused Sir Beltran Talbot—you could not do otherwise, of course, but it is the knowledge of that refusal that has sent me here. Vera, I have little—your world will tell you nothing, to offer—but my love, deep, changeless, true, I give! Is our marriage indeed to be looked upon as a misfortune? Can you never be my wife in reality, as well as in name?"

He stops, catching his breath hard. It is not when the heart is fullest the lips are most eloquent. The proudly handsome face before him does not soften one whit. For

the first time she doubts Richard Ffrench's word. She is in a false position—is it to save her from it he speaks now?

"I know of old," she answers, "how romantic and chivalrous is Colonel Ffrench's sense of duty. It led him once to marry a foolish, flighty school-girl, when he would have done much better to have rated her soundly for her folly in running after him, and gone and left her. If I had loved Sir Beltran Talbot, perhaps not even the fact of that nonsensical marriage would have been strong enough to prevent my telling him so, at least. I am not a very perfect person; no one knows that better than I. But my marriage had nothing to do with my refusal—understand that. As to the sacrifice you propose to make, in accepting the wife thrust upon you six years ago, while deeply grateful, I yet decline My life suits me very well. I am not a blighted being. I can dispense with lovers in the present, and a husband in the future, extraordinary as it may seem. Your friend I shall always be, Colonel Ffrench; your wife, other than I am now—never!"

Her pride is strong within her, it rings in her voice, it flashes in her eyes. Surely she has vindicated herself at last.

For a moment he does not speak. In that pause a great burst of music comes from the ball-room, the first bars of a grand triumphal march. He speaks first.

"You mean this?" he slowly says.

"I mean this," she answers, and meets his eyes full.

"Then there is no more to be said. Pardon me for having said so much, for having taken you from your friends. Good-night, and good-by."

An impulse is upon her, thoroughly contradictory, and thoroughly womanly, to call him back, to claim him, keep him, love him. Vera is a very woman, and consistently inconsistent. A flush sweeps over her face, to the very temples.

"Oh, come back! do not go!" is on her lips, but her lips refuse to speak. She stands so a moment, battling with her pride, and in that moment he goes. The door closes behind him; the sweep of the triumphal march speeds him; he is gone without even the poor return of an answer to his good-night. Pride has fought and won.

A wise general has said, that next to a great defeat a great victory is the most cruel of all things. Perhaps Vera realizes this now. She sits where he has left her, feeling faint and sick, her face hidden in her hands.

The crashing tide of the music comes down to her; the feet of the dancers echo overhead. She must go back to them, make one of them, wear a smiling face to the end. She loves Richard Ffrench, and she has sent him away; in the last half hour she has done what she will regret her whole life long.

Meantime the unbidden guest is gone. Once more he is in the outer darkness, in the night and the storm. The melancholy rain still drips, drips; the melancholy wind blows in long, sighing blasts; the black trees toss about like tall specters against the blacker sky. And a figure sheltered beneath them—the lagging pedestrian of an hour before—watches him with sinister eyes until he is out of sight.

CHAPTER XI.

A CRY IN THE NIGHT.

MRS. FANSHAWE'S ball is what Mrs. Fanshawe has meant it to be—a brilliant success. Her own spirits never flag; she dances incessantly, the red of her cheeks redder, the light of her eyes brighter, as the hours wear on. Who shall say that this radiant little hostess,

dancing like a Bacchante, wild with high spirits, flirting with the men about her with desperate recklessness and levity, is a neglected, slighted, supplanted, unloved wife? At supper she drinks iced champage as if parched with fever-thirst, until Vera's brows contract with wonder and alarm. She keeps near her sister through it all; something in Dora's wild excitement startles her; she dances scarcely once after her return to the ball-room.

"Where have you been?" Dora asks, hitting her a perfumed blow with her fan. "Why do you wear that owl-like face? This is no place for owlish faces. Why do you not dance? Everybody has been asking for you. What is the matter with you to-night, my solemn Vera?".

Her elfish laugh rings out—she flits on. A gentleman passing smiles to the lady on his arm.

"A case of twinkle, twinkle, little star!" he remarks. "What a radiantly happy woman our charming hostess must be!"

The lady shrugs her shoulders, and puts out a scornful little chin.

"She is half crazy to-night, or—tipsy with her own champagne! Did you not see how she drank at supper? It was perfectly shocking. See her sister watching her. Beautiful girl, Miss Martinez—do you not think?—a perfect type of the handsomest sort of brunette."

The gentleman smiles slightly, knowing better than to accept this artful challenge; but the eyes that rest for a moment on Vera have in them a light that makes his fair friend bite her lip.

"Some romance attaches to her—it does not seem quite clear what—but something connected with Dick Ffrench. You remember Captain Dick, of course. I *have* heard, but that I do not believe, that she was privately married to him before he went away."

"Fortunate Dick Ffrench!"

"Oh, it is a myth of course—*they say* being the only authority. It is added that she was very desperately in love with him, but that statement also is to be taken with a pinch of salt. She was little better than a child at the time—I recollect her well; a tall, slim girl, with a thin, dark face, big black eyes, and hardly a trace of the stately beauty we all admire now. Look at Mrs. Fanshawe with Fred Howell! Really, Mr. Fanshawe should be here to keep his wife in order. No one advocates matrimonial freedom more than I do, but there *is* a line, and she oversteps it. Upon my word she is quite too horrid."

Such comments, from ladies principally, run the round of the rooms. The gentlemen, more indulgent, only glance at each other, and smile. All recall afterward, when the tragedy of this night rings through the country with a thrill, her brilliance, her flashes of wit, her reckless spirits, her incessant dancing, her flushed cheeks, her streaming eyes, her flashing diamonds. Censorious tongues stop then appalled, fair censors falter—they recall her only as a bright little butterfly, looking hardly accountable for her acts, so fair, so frail, so almost unearthly. But just now, before the curtain falls on that last act, and the intoxication of music, and waltzing, and wine is at its height, they do not spare her. One or two words fall on Vera's ears, and her eyes flash out their indignation on the speakers. They are her guests, they break her bread and eat her salt, and sit in judgment on her. But oh! what ails Dot? How rash she is—she has never gone to such extremes before. It is more of Dane Fanshawe's work; he has goaded her to madness; this is her reckless revenge.

Perhaps it is as well for Vera's peace of mind that no time is left her to think of herself or her own wayward folly. She has acted like a fool in one way—Dora is acting like a fool in another; there is little to choose between them, that she admits bitterly. She keeps as close to Dora as may be;

she tries to restrain her unperceived; she resolutely refuses to dance.

"For pity's sake, Dot, do not go on so—every one is looking at you," she whispers, angrily, once. "You are insane, I think, to-night. Do not dance with Fred Howell again. He ought to be ashamed of himself——"

But Dora interrupts with one of her frequent bursts of laughter.

"Oh, Fred, listen here!" she calls; "here is richness! Look at Vera's owlish face; listen to her words of wisdom. 'Do not dance with Fred Howell again. He ought to be ashamed of himself!' Are you ashamed, Fred? You ought to be, if my sober sister says so—she is never wrong."

Mr. Howell stoops and whispers his answer. He glances at Vera with a malicious smile, he owes her a grudge for more than one cut direct, and he cordially hates supercilious Dane Fanshawe. He is paying a double debt to-night, in compromising his hates. Vera draws back, indignant and disgusted, and sees them go, Dora clinging to his arm. Fred Howell's tall, dark head bent over her blonde one—the most pronounced flirtation possible.

But it ends at last. Mrs. Fanshawe, foolish though she be in many things, is wise enough never to let daylight surprise her well-bred orgies, and stare in on haggard faces and leaden eyes. A little after three the guests begin to depart, at half-past the roll of carriages is continual, at four all but the guests are gone. And when the last good-night is said, Dora Fanshawe drops into a chair, and lifts a face to her sister, a face so drawn, so worn, so miserable, that all her sins and follies are forgotten. As by the touch of a magic wand, every trace of youth and prettiness departs in a second.

"I am tired to death!" she says. "I am tired to death! She draws a long, hard breath, and flings up her arms over her head. "I am tired to death—tired—tired—tired!"

There is weariness unspeakable in the gesture, heart-sickness so utter, so desperate, that Vera's anger melts like snow. She has meant to scold Dora for her madness, but all words of reproach die away in a passion of pity and love.

"My poor little dear!" she says. As a mother might, she gathers the flower-decked, jewel-crowned head to her breast. "Oh! my Dot, you have not been yourself to-night. I have been frightened for you. I am so glad it is all over, and that you can rest. No wonder you are tired—you have danced every dance. Let me take you to your room, and help you to bed."

Without a word Dora rises, and trails her rich ball-robe slowly and wearily up the stairs to her own room. Here she sinks in a powerless sort of way again into the first chair.

"I am dead tired," she repeats, mechanically. "If I only could sleep and not wake for the next forty-eight hours, I might be rested by the end of that time. Nothing less will do."

She lifts her heavy and dim eyes, and they fall on the dreary picture of the "Foolish Virgins." There they remain in sombre silence for a long time. Vera sends away Félicien and disrobes Dora herself with swift, deft fingers, with soft, soothing touches.

"Do you know," Dora says, at length, "that through it all—the crash of the band, and the whirl of the German, and the talk of those men—the face of that woman there has haunted me like a ghost? I can understand now how men take to drink to drown memory or remorse. All these long hours it has been beside me. Sometimes when I looked in Fred Howell's face—faugh! what a fool he is!—it was the deadly white face of that crouching woman I saw. And the words went with the vision—'Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now!' They have been ringing in my ears like a death-knell."

"You are morbid; your nerves are all unstrung," is Vera's

answer. "I wish I had not sung it. It is a weird picture—gloomy enough to haunt any one. Do not look at it any more. Shut your poor tired eyes while I brush out your hair; it will quiet you."

But the sombre blue eyes never leave the picture, and, when she speaks again, her question startles her sister, so that she nearly drops the brush.

"Vera," she says, "are you afraid to die?"

"Dot!"

"Afraid of the awful loneliness, the awful darkness, the awful Unknown. Vera, Vera! *I* am. I am afraid to grow old; but I hope—I hope—I hope I may be seventy, eighty, ninety, before I die! I am afraid of death—horribly afraid! If one could come back from the dead and tell us what it is like—where all this that aches so in life, heart, soul, conscience, whatever you call it, goes after that ghastly change. But they never do, and we go on blindly, and then all at once the world slips from under us, and we are—*where?* Or is it the end, and are we blankness and nothingness, as before we were born? That would be best. I do not think I would fear that—much!"

Vera kneels down beside her, and puts her arm around her, every trace of color leaving her face, her eyes dark and dilated with sudden terror.

"Dora," she says, "Dora, what is this? Are you in pain? Does your heart hurt you? Is it the spasms again?"

"Oh, no!" Dora answers, wearily, "nothing of that. I feel well enough; I never felt so well or happy in my life as I did to-night. I am dead tired now, that is all. And that picture troubles me like a bad dream. And your song—I cannot get that despairing refrain out of my ears. I wish I were a better woman, Vera, I wish I were as good, as wise as you——"

"As I?" Vera interrupts, almost with a cry "Oh, Dot Dot, as I!"

"You never carry on with men as the rest of us do They have to respect you. You would not make a fool of yourself with Fred Howell as I did, come what might. You go to church every Sunday, rain or shine. You have pious little books, and you read them, and you believe in God and heaven, and all good things. Vera," she breaks out, and it is a very cry of passionate pain, of a soul in utter darkness, "*is* there a God, and must I answer to Him for the life I lead; and when I die will He send me forever to——"

But Vera's hand is over her mouth. Dora is certainly mad to-night—her husband's cruelty has turned her brain!

"Hush! hush! hush!" she exclaims, in horror. "Oh, my Dot! my Dot!"

What shall she say to this blind, groping soul, lost in the chaos of unbelief? What she does say is in a broken voice, full of pity and pathos; Dora is too worn out to listen to much. But she speaks of the infinite goodness and love of Him whose tender mercies are over all His works.

"If you would but pray," she says, imploringly, "it is all, it is everything, the 'key of the day and the lock of the night.' Only this morning I was reading a book of Eastern travels, and the writer says a beautiful thing. He is speaking of the camels so heavily laden all the weary day, who kneel at its close to be unstrapped and unladen. And he says, we, like the camels, kneel down at night, and our burdens are lifted from us. If you would but kneel, Dot, and believe and pray, our loving Father, who hears the cry of every hopeless heart before it is spoken, would help you to bear it all."

Dora does not answer—she lies back with closed eyes, white, spent, mute. Vera rises and resumes her work; in a few minutes an embroidered night-dress has replaced the rainbow costume and jewels, and Mrs. Fanshawe lies down on her white bed with a long, tired sigh.

"It is good to rest," she says; "I hope I may sleep until

sunset to-morrow. See that I am not disturbed, will you? I want to sleep—to sleep—to sleep."

The words trail off heavily—the last these pale lips will ever utter—and then, with closed eyes, she lies quite still among the pillows. Vera hastily replaces the jewels in their caskets, and arranges them on the table near the bed, flings the ball costume over a chair, turns down the gas to a tiny point, kisses her sister gently, locks the door on the inside, and leaves the bedroom. She goes by way of the dressing-room adjoining, the door of which she also locks, and takes the key. Félician may enter in the morning, according to custom, with her lady's matutinal chocolate, and Dora's sleep must not be disturbed.

In her own room, she throws open the window, folds a wrap about her, and sits down, glad to be alone. She feels no desire for sleep; her mind is abnormally wakeful and active. How dark it is! and how heavily it rains! The scent of wet grasses and dripping trees ascends; there is not a ray of light in the black sky; the whole world seems blotted out in darkness and wet, and she the only living thing left.

Is Dora asleep, she wonders—poor, poor Dora! Thank Heaven, it is not yet too late! thank Heaven, there is yet time for faith and repentance, and the beginning of a better, less worldly life! It has been a great and silent trouble to Vera during the past six years, the cynical, scoffing unbelief of her sister, so hateful in a man, so utterly revolting in a woman. But it is not too late, it is never too late for penitence and amendment this side of eternity. Then her thoughts shift. the face of Richard Ffrench rises before her in the gloom, so full of silent, sad reproach. She loves him, and she has sent him from her—oh, folly beyond belief! and yet so thoroughly the folly of a woman. "I liked that Vera—I love this!" —the bound her heart gives as she recalls the words! They are true, or he would not speak them. No sense of loyalty

to her would make him tell her a thing that is false. He is true as truth, true as steel, good, brave, a noble man. And she has sent him away!—the thought stings her with keenest pain and regret. Oh, this pride that exacts such a price! Is it too late to retract? He is going back to Cuba, to his death it may be; no man can carry a charmed life forever, and he will never know she loves him. No! a sudden, glad resolution fills her, for her, no more than for Dot, is repentance too late. He cannot leave St. Ann's before seven to-morrow—there is time, and to spare, yet. She will write to him, and tell him all—the whole truth; one of the men shall start with the letter at six o'clock, and give it to him at the station. And then—a smile and blush steal over her face—he will return to her, and *then*——

She leaves the window, turns up the gas, sits down, and, without waiting to think, commences to write. The words flow faster than she can set them down—not very loving, perhaps; she cannot show him all that is in her heart just yet, but good wifely words, that will surely bring him. It is not long; little will suffice; she signs, and seals, and directs. Then, as she sits looking at the familiar name, a thought strikes her; it is the second time in her life she has written to Richard Ffrench. She recalls that other letter, and laughs, in the new hope and happiness of her heart. Was there ever such another absurd epistle penned? No wonder Dot was amused—poor Dot! who declared that in the annals of sentimental literature, it would stand alone. She is well disposed to forgive Dot to-night for her share in her marriage. If she were still free to choose, he is the man of all men she would give herself to. Many men she has met, known, esteemed, liked—loved not one except this man whose wife she is, and him she loves with her whole heart.

Five strikes somewhere down stairs. She is not sleepy, but it is best to lie down and rest. So in a few moments she is amid her pillows and, very soon, the deep, tranquil

sleep of first youth and perfect health falls upon her, and she slumbers quietly as a little child.

What was that! She sits up in sudden terror in the darkness. Was it a cry—a cry for help? She listens, her heart beating fast. Dead silence reigns, deep darkness is everywhere. Has she been dreaming, or was it the shriek of a night bird, the scream of a belated gull? No second sound follows, and yet, how like a cry it was, a human cry, of fear, of pain!

She rises hastily; she must make sure; perhaps Dot—she dare not finish the sentence. She throws on a dressing-gown, and hurries to Dora's room. A dim light burns in the corridor; she inserts the key softly in the dressing-room door, enters, approaches the bedroom, and looks in. All is peace. The gas burns, a tiny star of light; on the bed Dora lies, faintly to be discerned, quite still, sleeping deeply.

"Thank Heaven!" Vera breathes, "it was a dream or a night bird, after all."

* * * * * * *

Left alone Dora Fanshawe drops asleep almost at once—the spent sleep of utter exhaustion. The loud beat of the rain on the windows does not break her rest, the heavy surging of the trees is unheard. She sleeps heavily, dreamlessly, and then, without sound or cause, suddenly awakes And yet there is a sound in the room, a sound faint, indeed, but terrible, the sound of a man stealthily opening the jewel-cases. She springs up in bed, and a shriek, wild, piercing, long, rings through the house.

He turns with an oath, and puts his hand over her mouth. But Dora is a plucky little woman, and struggles in his grasp like a tiger-cat.

"D—— you!" he says, between his clenched teeth, 'I'll shoot you if you don't be still!"

A crape mask covers his face. With one hand she tears it off, with the other she grasps the heavy whiskers he wears.

Their eyes meet—the light of the gas-jet falls full upon him—the struggle ceases—for one awful instant she stares up at him, he down on her. Then with a dull, inarticulate sound she falls back, still retaining her hold. He tears himself free, violently, and, without giving her a second glance, thrusts the last of the jewels into his pockets, unlocks the chamber door, and flies. He is out in the pitch darkness of the wild wet morning before Vera looks into her sister's room.

And Dora lies still and sleeps on, but with wide open, glazing eyes, fixed in some strong horror. She lies motionless, and the open eyes staring blankly at the ceiling flutter not, nor close. She has her wish; she will sleep, and on this earth that sleep will never be broken. The splendor and the glory of the world spread at her feet would fail to win one glance of gladness from those sightless eyes. The mighty problem is solved—of Time and Eternity—the soul that has fled in the darkness and silence of the night has looked upon the holy and awful face of God.

The hours wear on; inside the sleepers sleep, and quiet reigns; outside the wind veers, and drives the storm-clouds before it; a few stars palely usher in the dawn. Sounds of life begin in the house, servants still sleepy and tired drag themselves down stairs. Scarlet and crimson clouds push away with rosy hands the blackness, and presently the sun rises like the smile of God upon the world. But Dora Fanshawe rises not, will rise no more until the resurrection day.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE DEAD HAND.

THE first gleam of that jubilant sunshine awakes Vera, and she gets up. It is half-past six; profound quiet reigns, no one is yet stirring. Her letter is her first thought, and with it comes a second that did not present itself last night—none of the men are yet down, coachman, gardener, stable-boys, butler—how then is she to send it? A third difficulty presents itself, these men-servants are all new—Fanshawe retainers—who know nothing of the Charlton dynasty, or of Captain Dick. The result is her letter is a failure, her penitence too late, it cannot be sent.

An intolerable sense of annoyance and disappointment fills her. She has hoped so much only for this. The fault is all her own, but it is doubtful if that knowledge ever made any failure the easier to bear. It is inevitable, however; the letter cannot go.

She has dressed hastily, and stands by the window looking out over the grounds, intense vexation in her face. No one is to be seen, none of the usual morning sounds are to be heard, although far upstairs doors and windows begin to be opened. While she stands and looks, a man suddenly appears, emerging from the summer-house, at sight of whom she gives a great and sudden start. For, extraordinary to relate, it is Colonel Ffrench himself. At first she cannot believe her eyes, but they are far-sighted and seldom deceive her. It is Colonel Ffrench himself, walking with the long, military stride she knows so well, carrying himself after his usual resolute and erect fashion, his hat pulled well over his

eyes, going rapidly toward the gates. He does not once look back—if he does he must see her—but he does not. He has not gone then, after all, he will not catch the early train, she will be in time perhaps yet.

Sudden delight takes the place of amaze, to give way to amaze again. Why is he here? Where has he been all night? Surely not yonder in the rain? If he stayed in the summer-house he escaped the storm of course, but why has he stayed? He neither fears a night walk nor a wetting. How cruel she was, how inhospitably cruel to let him go as she did, to turn him from his own house. For his right to Charlton is better than Dot's, in justice, if not in law, two things by no means synonymous. How keen his pain and disappointment must have been, how bitter his thoughts there in the darkness, and the loneliness, and the pelting storm, while they danced and feasted within. And he loves her! How merciless she has been, how merciless! and all the while the whole world is not half so much to her as he. Her eyes fill with slow, remorseful tears, a passion of tenderness and regret sweeps through her. She has thought Dot crazy last night, but never in her wildest moments has poor Dot been half so insane, half so inconsistent as she.

That reminds her—she must go to Dot. Colonel Ffrench cannot leave St. Ann's now before five in the afternoon. A long day lies before her. Just at present her duty is to her sister, so she puts her own solicitude aside and hastens to Dora's chamber. On the bed Dora lies motionless, sleeping still. Closed shutters and drawn curtains shut out the sunshine, the gas yet flickers feebly, and, to her surprise, Vera sees that the bedroom door is ajar. It was locked on the inside when she quitted the room at half-past four this morning. She sees something else—the empty and rifled jewel-cases. One lies on the floor, two others on the table, but all empty and despoiled. And now, in great and sudden

terror, she looks again at the bed. Dora is there—yes—but oh! what is this? The rigid face, the upturned, staring, sightless, glazed eyes, the fallen jaw, the ice-cold hands. For a moment, two, three, four, she stands paralyzed, stricken dumb; then a shriek pierces the air, goes through the house, another and another, until in five seconds as it seems, the room is filled with frightened, half-dressed people. Guests and servants flock in terror.

"Oh! what is it!" is the cry on every side. What they see is Mrs. Fanshawe lying dead on her bed, and her sister kneeling beside her, clasping her hands, frantic, beside herself with fright and grief.

"Dot, speak to me! Dot, look at me! Dot, my sister, it is Vera! Do you not hear? Oh! great Heaven! no, she does not hear. She will never hear! She is dead! She is murdered!"

She throws herself upon her, she gathers her in her arms, wild with the shock, the horror of her loss. "She is murdered, she is murdered!" she cries again and again in that piercing voice, and at the dreadful word all recoil.

"Murdered!" pale lips echo, and terrified eyes meet in dismay. One man approaches and touches Vera gently on the shoulder.

"Miss Martinez, my dear Miss Martinez, be calm. Let me see your sister; I am a medical man, you know. She may not be dead, it may only be a fainting fit. Do let me look at her; lay her down. My dear Miss Vera, listen to me."

She looks up at him—a look of agony that haunts him for many a day, a look of unutterable horror and fear.

"She is dead," she says in a whisper, "she is dead. While we all slept she has been robbed and murdered!" The light leaves her eyes with the last word, her arms relax their hold, Dr. Vanderhoff catches her as she falls.

"Thank Heaven! she has fainted. Here, take her away

Get out of the room all of you ; let us see if anything is to be done."

Somebody carries Vera away, one or two weeping women follow. Restoratives are sent for, but she lies for many minutes as death-like as Dora herself. For Dora—Dr. Vanderhoff stands high in his profession, but the whole college of surgeons would be unavailing here. His first glance has told him as much, but he is bound to do all he can. A few of the frightened guests remain in the room, the shutters are flung wide, the glorious golden sunlight floods the room, floods the dead face, the fixed, wide-open eyes ; a grisly sight to see.

"Oh! doctor, is it true? is she dead?" one lady asks, with a sob.

"She is quite dead, madam, stone dead, and has been for hours. She is already cold. It is heart-disease."

He rises from his hopeless task, and tries to close the lids over those stony eyeballs that only a few hours ago, so awfully few, flashed with life and joy.

"It was only a question of time," Dr. Vanderhoff says, quietly. He is her guest and old friend, but he is also a physician of many years' standing, and all the professional phlegm is in his face and tone. "I have known for the last three years that one day it would come to this. A shock might have done it at any moment. Poor little woman!"

He stands looking at her, a touch of pity mingling with the professional composure of his face. The eyes will not close, they still strain upward, and on the white dead face is frozen a last look of unutterable fear.

"What did Miss Martinez mean by murder?" somebody asks. Dr. Vanderhoff shrugs his shoulders.

"A woman's first natural thought in a case like this. They were very much attached to each other, unusually attached. It will be a sad blow to her."

"She spoke of robbery, too," says another, "and look here—look at these empty jewel-caskets. Can it be——"

"And look at the awful expression of her face," exclaims a third; "as if her last look in life had been one of dreadful fright or pain. Perhaps robbery and—and murder have been done after all."

"Not murder," says Dr. Vanderhoff, incisively. "Mrs. Fanshawe has died of heart-disease. Robbery there may possibly have been—not murder."

Strangely enough no one speaks of her husband, or seems to think of him in this appalling hour. The infelicity of the Fanshawes is well known, the notorious neglect of the husband has become an accepted fact. Silence falls on all, and in that silence, Vera, with two or three ladies, re-enters the room. All make way; her face is white to deathliness, her eyes all wild and black. She comes forward as if she saw no one, and kneels beside the bed. So kneeling, without a word, she looks on the face of the dead.

"My dear Miss Vera," says Dr. Vanderhoff. There is feeling in his voice: this is outside the profession. "My dear Miss Vera——" and here he stops and taps his gold eye-glass against his palm. It is not so easy to find words for the shock of a sorrow like this.

She does not weep, she is strangely, stonily still; she looks up at him, and her voice when she speaks, though hoarse and hurried, has no trace of hysterics or tears.

"She has been robbed," she says, and points to the empty jewel-cases, "and murdered while we all slept."

"Not murdered, my dear child; do not think anything so dreadful. Your poor sister has gone, as I knew she one day must go, of heart-disease. It is a shock, but it should not be a surprise. She was liable at any time. Her death was instantaneous and free from pain."

"She has been murdered," Vera repeats; "it is the same thing. She was robbed, and the terror of seeing the robber

killed her. If he had shot her he could not have slain her more surely."

"My dear young lady——"

"There are the empty cases," she cries, passionately; "they were filled this morning when I left her. They were worth over ten thousand dollars. And look here, look at this."

For the first time she sees the crape, crushed into a ball in her sister's hand. Gently she disengages it, quivering through all her frame as she feels the icy touch. She holds it up.

"Look!" she says, in a stifled voice. He takes it in silence. It seems a clear case, there has been a struggle, and she has torn this from the face of the robber. It is a mask, with holes for the eyes and mouth.

"The other hand is closed too," says Dr. Vanderhoff, in a subdued tone.

She takes it. "Oh! my little Dot! my little Dot!" she says, and breaks down. It is but for an instant; she lifts her pallid face and slowly and with difficulty separates the stiffened fingers. "Oh! look! look!" she cries out, "see this. Oh! my little love! my little love!"

It is a sight that sends a thrill through every heart; a sight that shows while they all slept poor little Dora has fought for her life. And yet it is only a little tuft of hair, torn from the head or beard of the burglar.

"Let me secure this," says Dr. Vanderhoff; "it may be necessary."

Vera shrinks back and covers her face, trembling all over. Oh! Dora! Dora! Oh! the agony that must have been hers in that ghastly struggle, face to face with death—that dark death she feared so much. And she, the sister who loved her, slept through it all. There flashes upon her the memory of that cry in the night. Dora's death-cry. While she stood in yonder doorway, while she fancied she slept

Dora was already dying or dead. She breaks out into wild weeping, frantic hysterical weeping, all unlike Vera. Oh! my sister! my sister! my sister!" is her cry.

And meantime Dr. Vanderhoff has carefully gathered up every hair from the palm of the dead hand. The small, pale fingers have clenched over them, as if even in death unwilling to let them go. He puts up his glass to inspect his prize; the last doubt is removed. Violence has been here, robbery has been done, the shock has caused death. The others crowd about him and look with intense, morbid interest. The hair is short, some of the longest perhaps three inches, and pale-brown or chestnut in color.

"Torn from a man's beard," says the doctor, "not his head. There is a marked difference in the texture. Poor little woman!"

And now the shock is over, and people come back to the inevitable "What next?" What next is to inform the authorities; notify the coroner. There must be an inquest, he supposes, Dr. Vanderhoff suggests, with a deprecating shrug and pitying look at Vera. And they must get on the track of the burglar; he is half way back to New York by this time, no doubt. It seems clear enough to his mind. It is not the work of a local thief; some tramp has given information to the skilled city fraternity of the jimmy and skeleton-key, and one or more have lain in waiting for these valuable jewels. How rash not to have had the constabulary on guard, or so much as a safe in the house. But it is so like a lady.

"Poor little thing," says the physician, for the third time. "I never saw her look so pretty, or seem in such high spirits as last night. Those unlucky diamonds, too; I remember being struck by them at the time. That fellow, her husband," says Dr. Vanderhoff, lowering his tone, "what about him? Where is he? He ought to be apprised, I suppose. Not that it matters much; a worthless vagabond. Who knows his address?"

No one knows it. Miss Martinez very likely may, but no ones feels like asking her just at present.

"In his absence, as the oldest man, a friend of the family, and poor Mrs. Fanshawe's medical adviser, I shall take it upon myself to direct proceedings for the present. Here, my man, do you go to the village and send Mrs. Fanshawe's attorney here; lose no time. Lodge information of this sad affair with your leading local magistrate. For you, my dear ladies, I think it will be best to clear the room; the women-servants will wish to prepare our poor friend, *etcetera*. And do take away this poor child, if you can."

But they cannot; no one can remove Vera, and they go and leave her. It is nine o'clock now, and the guests disperse to talk over, in excited whispers, what has been done and what is to be done. The first thing is, that by the train to-morrow they must depart. Charlton Place from a house of feasting has become a house of death and mourning; they must leave it. They can do nothing here, and poor Miss Martinez will prefer to be alone. Ah! what a blow for her. But no doubt Mrs. Fanshawe has made her will and provided for her well, left her everything very likely, and cut off her profligate husband with a shilling. It will serve him right, the wretch, cry the ladies who were hardest on Dora last night. He is in New York, no doubt, the close friend still of that horrid Lalage.

* * * * * * * * *

The day passes, many people come and go: the news rings through the town like wild-fire. St. Ann's is a place where literally nothing happens. Since trade, and whalers, and Portuguese seamen became things of the past, no violent death has ever been heard of within a radius of thirty miles. People grow up, marry, and live happily forever after. A burial is a rarity, a wedding a marvel, a birth a a thing to be discussed, in all its bearings, for a fortnight. A

murder is unprecedented. All the circumstances tend to lend romantic interest and gloom to this tragedy. The brilliant birthday ball, the awful ending.

The authorities cannot believe their responsible ears; the coroner—people have almost forgotten that potentate exists—stands aghast. He awakes to find sudden and unwelcome greatness thrust upon him.

People come with stealthy steps into the darkened room where the pale little lady of Charlton lies, and look with bated breath into the rigid face and staring eyes that no hand is strong enough to close, at the silent black figure sitting motionless beside it, and steal unconsciously away. Vera sees none of them, she sits there in stupor, her hands locked together, her eyes on the face of her sister. She "cannot wake her dead;" it is not her Dot that lies here, it is some white, mute thing, some pale, dreadful image, that fascinates her, and that she cannot leave. Absolutely her mind seems to wander sometimes. It is *not* Dot, this ghastly face and rigid form. Dora dead!—Dora, who was the gayest where all was gay only a few hours ago; whom she undressed and kissed good-night such a little time back; whose sleepy words still sound in her ears. Why, no, it is not Dot! Dot dead! How strangely that sounds! She puts her hand to her head in a dazed sort of way; her thoughts seem all disconnected, everything about her unreal. People touch her, speak to her; she never knows who, nor what they say. Some one—Harriet—presses her to eat, and she looks at her in dismay. Eat! and this white, solemn wonder lying here!—this face of stone that they say is Dot! Sometimes she turns two dull, half-sightless eyes across to where the gloomy picture hangs, and at last a resentful feeling—the first feeling of any kind she is conscious of in her numbness—rises within her. *It* has had something to do with this dreadful thing that has fallen upon her. "Take it away!" she says, angrily, to Harriet, who hovers about her constantly.

I hate it!—so did she! It frightened her last night. Take t away!"

Without a word, Harriet removes the picture, and the dreary gaze goes back to the dead.

"If she would only cry a spell!" said Harriet, crying copiously herself, "'twould do her a sight o' good. It's a dreffful thing to see her a-settin' like that. I declare it skeers me, and I ain't of the easy skeert kind nuther."

Early in the afternoon a visitor comes, whom Harriet receives with distinction. After a moment's whispered colloquy, she goes up to the dark room with a glimmer of new hope. "If any one can perk her up, 'twill be him. She allers set a sight o' store by Captain Dick," she thinks.

She bends above her with wonderful gentleness for grim old Harriet.

"Miss Vera, honey, here's Captain Dick, your own Captain Dick, deary, and he wants to see you. Won't you come down to him just a minute?"

Vera looks up, with a certain angry impatience that is singularly unlike her. Even this name is powerless to move her.

"I want to stay here. Do let me alone. So many people come! I wish they would not. Why can't I be quiet? Go away, Harriet!"

"But, lovey, Captain Dick——"

"Oh! what does he want? I thought he was gone. I can't go. I don't want to talk. Do leave me alone—do—do!"

It is of no use; nothing can arouse her, and Harriet goes. Colonel Ffrench listens, profound trouble and anxiety on his face.

"Poor child!" he says. "No wonder she is stunned. I shall remain, Harriet, until the end. Do what you can for her—poor child, poor child!"

Night closes over the gloomy house, wears away, and a sec-

ond morning dawns. There is little change in Vera. They cannot force her away, but she has fallen heavily and exhaustedly asleep at her post, and Dr. Vanderhoff lifts her and lays her on her bed. The guests go, glad to be gone. An officer or two are down from the city, and search has begun for the burglar. As yet little trace has been found. In the soft gravel and clay footprints have been discovered, but so many have come and gone that that amounts to little. A man has spent the night in the summer-house, for the stable-boy, looking out about seven o'clock, from his attic window, saw him hastily depart. But burglars do not, as a rule, for fear of a wet jacket, take shelter in the grounds of the place they have robbed. Still a note is made of it, the summer house searched, and nothing found. The inquest is to be on the third day; something will come to light then. The robbery and the death, alone, are talked of everywhere. Who is to inherit Mrs. Fanshawe's fortune?

And then it leaks out—no one knows how—that the late Mr. Charlton's step-son, Richard Ffrench, is sole heir. Some one has seen him, and tells some one else. Richard Ffrench is here, and for the first time in six years. What is he doing here? No one knows. Is he—was he—a friend of Mrs. Fanshawe? Not likely, or he would have been at the house. But he *was* at the house, late last night, though he was not at the ball. How this last fact gets wind it is impossible to say—you might as well hope to wring secrets from the tomb as from Harriet, but get wind it does. The very birds of the air seem to carry news to-day. He was at the house last night in secret and uninvited. He and Mrs. Fanshawe were not good friends. He is the heir—sole heir, *the only one to profit by her death!* Men look at one another. Men stare at him in the street as he passes by. Silence falls on talkative groups when he appears. *Suspicion*—that most awful thing that can look out of human eyes—suspicion looks at him out of all the eyes he meets. In

what manner the truth comes to him it is difficult to tell, but it does come in a slow, creeping amaze and shock, that turns him cold. It is not the shock of physical fear—that he has never known; it is something quite different and unspeakably more terrible. It takes to itself wings, the breeze carries it, the birds sing it—it penetrates every corner of St. Ann's. And on the evening of this second day it reaches Charlton Place and is breathed in the ear of Harriet Hart. Who the audacious tale-bearer may be is unknown—Harriet's glance of wrathful scorn must have annihilated him forever. But she sets her thin lips and marches straight to Vera. *She* must know this.

The dark, hopeless eyes look up at her pathetically. If only for one hour they would leave her alone!

"Miss Vera," says Harriet, resolutely, "you must rouse yourself and listen to me. It is time. Captain Ffrench is here, and——"

"Again!" Vera breaks in with a tired sort of cry. "Oh! I cannot see him! Why do you torment me? I thought he had gone."

"He is not gone—he is not going—he will not be let go, mebbe, if he wants to. Are you so took up with the dead that you have no feelin' left for the livin'? I tell you a horid thing is goin' about, and you've got to hear it if you should take on ever so. The man's your husband when all's said and done, and a live husband is more'n a dead sister, I reckon, any day. Captain Dick is here, and—look at me, Miss Vera—listen to me—the folks is a sayin' as *he* is the thief that broke in and stole Miss Fanshawe's diamonds!"

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE DARK HOUR.

IT is the third day, and the inquest is about to begin. Very many people are present—it is rumored that Miss Martinez is to testify, and that the suspected man will be there. It is rumored, too, that Colonel Ffrench and Miss Martinez are more to each other than the world knows, and that it was to see *her* he visited Charlton on the night of the robbery. The interest in the tragedy deepens with every hour. The military rank and romantic history of the dashing soldier of fortune intensify it; the rumor that he is positively the husband of Miss Martinez, and has been so for many years, adds a zest beyond belief. It will be curious to see them together—to hear her testify against him, it may be. She is hardly likely to spare a husband she will not live with, where a sister, beloved beyond the love of sisters, is concerned. Mr. Dane Fanshawe has not yet been notified of his bereavement. Vera does not know his address, it appears, and fires up with sudden passion at the bare mention of his name.

"It is his fault!" she cries out, vehemently—"it is his doing! If he had been here, it would never have happened!" More than this she declines to say. "I hate him!" she breaks forth, when the question is pressed—"I never want to see his face or hear his name! I would not tell you if I knew!"

So Mr. Fanshawe is still absent, and people are a little shocked at Miss Martinez's vehemence. It is all the more striking as her general manner is all that there is of high-bred repose. Still she is perhaps excusable, poor thing; she has

lost everything, and, apart from that, she really loved her sister very dearly. They stood quite alone in the world, and poor Mrs. Fanshawe has been as a mother to her. What a singular will that of old Mr. Charlton is! Still, considering how infatuated he was about Dora, and how very fond of Dick in those days, natural. And Dick Ffrench inherits everything! Humph! say the gossips, and look at him curiously—it is hoped he will clearly account for every hour of that fatal night, from the time he parted with Miss Martinez until after the discovery in Mrs. Fanshawe's room.

The jury and coroner take their places, looking uncomfortable; they are rustic gentlemen, and the coroner has known and liked Dick Ffrench ever since he first came to Charlton. The officers of the detective force, and the local constabulary, are also present. The crowd is great, it fills the long ballroom where the inquest is held. Every one stares about curiously. It was in this room she danced away the last hours of her life. The serious-minded shudder; that was a dance of death indeed, a dreadful way to go down to the grave—one's last act a crazy cotillion. But up stairs, in her costly, silver-mounted, satin-lined casket, Dora lies, with face of marble and frozen eyes, and hears nor heeds not. And into the long, thronged apartment Miss Martinez comes presently and there is a flutter. a hush-h-h! from all, and every eye turns upon her

How white she is in her long, straight, black dress, with its great folds of crape; how tall, how solemn. She has grown thin, and her big black eyes look unnaturally large and weird.

She goes straight to where Colonel Ffrench sits, and holds out her hand.

"I am glad you are here," she says, steadily. "It is kind of you to stay."

A dark flush mounts to his forehead—he rises and takes in both his, the hand she extends, and does not quickly let it go

Greedily the crowd strain eyes to see, and ears to listen. They are friends then, these two, after all. But Richard Ffrench understands—she has heard the truth, the suspicions afloat have reached her. This is her vindication. It is the same true, brave instinct that sent her to his side that morning at Shaddeck Light, with her head thrown back, her eyes flashing, and her defiant "Captain Dick is not to blame!"

God bless her! she is the same dear little Vera after all!

Miss Martinez is giving her testimony with wonderful clearness and conciseness, considering the effort it cost her to be here at all. Harriet's words have roused her, thoroughly and effectually; she will relapse into stupor no more. To suspect Richard Ffrench of so ignoble a crime! of so dastardly a deed! Richard Ffrench, brave as his namesake of old, without fear and without reproach, to steal in, and rob a woman! How dare they! Her splendid eyes blaze on these people—if looks were lightning it would go ill with some of the St. Ann's gossips. She tells her story without breaking down once, and is allowed to depart. On her way out she turns to Colonel Ffrench again.

"Come back this evening," she says, "it is so lonely;" her lip quivers. "Come and share my watch—my last."

"I will come," he answers, more moved than he dare show, and he clasps her hand once more a moment, and sees her go.

Dr. Vanderhoff gives his testimony—he is positive no violence has been used. Mrs. Fanshawe died of heart-disease. The shock of seeing the robber, and struggling with him, as she evidently did, was the immediate cause, but by any act of violence on his part—no. The hair and crape are produced; they go to prove that the thief was masked, and wore whiskers, either real or false. All eyes at this point, turn instinctively to the Cuban colonel, sitting with folded arms, and coldly resolute face. *He* wears no

whiskers or beard, a heavy, dark mustache alone shades his mouth, but does not conceal its fine, determined contour, nor the shapely, well-rounded, obstinate chin. A man whose reputation is not lightly to be trifled with; a man not to be too quickly or easily accused; a man who knows how to defend his own honor and good name, or that mouth and chin, those dark, determined eyes, belie him.

Dr. Vanderhoff goes, and the servants are examined. Have any of them seen tramps or suspicious characters lurking about lately? And then it comes out that the stable-boy has. Johnny, the stable-boy, appears, looking frightened and irresolute. He stammers a great deal, and what he has to say is not easily got at. Got at, however, it amounts to this—at seven on the morning of the death, he saw a man coming out of the summer-house in the grounds, and hurrying away toward the gates. Did he know the man? No, Johnny does not know him, but—more frightened than before—he breaks off, and looks askance at Colonel Ffrench.

"'Twas *him!*" Johnny says, with a burst.

Then there is a thrill, and a hard-drawn breath, and a sensation through the crowd, if you like! And in the midst of it Colonel Ffrench rises, as calm as he is wont to be when he leads his men to the hottest of the fight, but perhaps a trifle more pale.

"The lad is quite right," he says, "it was I he saw. I left the summer-house about seven on that morning."

"You are not obliged, Colonel French——" begins the coroner, nervously, but Colonel Ffrench goes quietly on:

"I had been here about ten the preceding night. Private business, concerning only myself and Miss Martinez, brought me. It was not necessary to disturb Mrs. Fanshawe by my presence, so I did not see her. I remained conversing with Miss Martinez over half an hour. Then I left. It was raining heavily, and blowing a gale. I did not care about facing the two-mile walk to St. Ann's in the teeth

of the storm, and knowing the place well, I went to the summer-house. I sat there for some hours, but the storm did not abate, and finally I fell asleep. I left as soon as I woke, about seven, and so missed the first train to New York, which I had intended to take."

There is silence—extremely awkward silence. Dr. Hunter, the coroner, has never felt so embarrassed and nonplussed in his life. It has an ugly look—a devilishly ugly look, he thinks, for the colonel. What the deuse made him stay in the summer-house? Confound the summer-house, and confound Johnny's prying eyes. He gives that youngster a savage glance that makes him quake. There is not much more to be done. The whole thing is hasty and informal, the jury feel as uncomfortable as the coroner, and about noon a verdict in "accordance with the facts" is returned. Mrs. Fanshawe has died of heart-disease, induced by the shock of the robbery committed by some person or persons unknown.

The detectives down from New York look at one another and grin. Men exchange looks, and shrug their shoulders, coroner and jury look unspeakably relieved, and depart with stolid faces. They have done *their* duty—now let the detectives find out the robber if they can. The throng disperses, and Colonel Ffrench follows, amazingly erect and upright, cool and unflinching for a suspected criminal.

That evening brings Mr. Dane Fanshawe, pale, breathless, horror-stricken. Vera looks at him in honest surprise, as she sees the grief, the real regret in his face, and softens to him ever so little.

After all, perhaps, some men cannot help being half fool, half knave—it seems born with them—and he has reason to be sorry, for he has killed the goose that laid the golden eggs. Vera cannot refrain from telling him so.

"All that will not bring her back," she says, with a touch of scorn; "if you had been here, it need never have happened. I say it is *your* doing as much as the burglars'!"

"But, good Heaven! Vera, how could I tell?" He is so pale, so piteous, so tremulous, as he says it, that she relents. "I did not think—how could *any* one ever think it would come to this?"

"She showed me your telegram!" Vera exclaims, her eyes flashing. "From first to last, Dane Fanshawe, you have acted toward her like a brute, and—oh, my poor little Dot, she was fond of *you!*"

He lays his face on the mantel with a groan. He is actually crying, the weak, poor creature; but it is more than Vera, than any one would have given him credit for.

"I would give my life, so hear me Heaven," he says, "to bring her back!"

Perhaps at the moment he means it. She sighs drearily, and lays her tired head down upon the casket.

"Bring her back!" she repeats, with a sob; "bring her back! Oh, Dora! my dear, my dear!"

She has not wept much, but some subtle chord is touched every now and then, and a rain of tears follows. She cries now silently and long. "My dear little love! my dear little love!" she repeats over and over. Never once has one unkind or harsh word fallen from Dora's lips to her. Dora has loved her, cared for her, made sacrifices for her, and in Dora's dying hour, in her desperate death struggle, she was not there to save or help.

Richard Ffrench comes, and she lifts two streaming eyes for one moment in appeal to his face. "You are all I have, do not leave me!" that glance says, if he could but read it. He takes his place near her in silence, but a silence that is full of sympathy, and that soothes her. It is good to have him here, it is a comfort, a protection, something to cling to in her great and sudden shipwreck.

The funeral is to be next day, and the concourse will be unprecedented. The whole country side means to turn

out in sombre force. Friends come down from the city—no such funeral has ever taken place in St. Ann's. Many persons pass in and out in the room of death; Vera is there constantly, worn and wan to a degree. Once, as she sits at her dreary and solitary post, a small, common-looking man comes up to her, and makes an awkward bow.

"Ask pardon, miss," he says, in an apologetic, guarded undertone. "I'm Daggit."

Vera stares blankly.

"Daggit, miss," repeats the small man, in a whisper, "of the detective force—private. Employed by your sister—party lately deceased. Down here on my own hook, in this unpleasant business. Would you mind telling me, miss, who that nice-looking, lady-like young gentleman is?"

He points straight at Dane Fanshawe.

"Him, miss, with the wipe—ask pardon, the handkerchief up to his face. He's the husband, ain't he, miss?"

"Yes," she says, mechanically; "it is Mr. Fanshawe."

Mr. Daggit's light eyes seem to bore two holes through Mr. Fanshawe's anatomy on the spot.

"Thanky, miss. Yes, I knowed it was. Not on good terms, was they, miss—him and the deceased party? Speak up, miss, if you please. I've tackled this job on my own hook, and mean to see daylight."

"No, not on good terms," answers Vera, still half bewildered as to his drift.

"Hard up, wasn't he, miss? Running after a play-actor—ask pardon for naming her. They're expensive, that lot—uncommon! Deceased party—ask pardon, lady wouldn't pay his debts? Hem-m!"

Mr. Daggit bores another hole through Mr. Fanshawe, and passes his hand musingly over his mouth.

"Was in Philadelphia at the time, wasn't he?"

"In Philadelphia."

"Only saw it in the *Herald* by chance—rum start that, for

a man. The coroner's got the hair?" he says, so abruptly that Vera stares at him once more.

"Yes," she says, wonderingly.

The light eyes are on Mr. Dane Fanshawe's Dundreary whiskers, as if counting every separate hair.

"Hum-m!" he muses again. "And that tall gent, with the broad shoulders, and his head up, is he heir?—him as they—ask pardon, miss—him as they suspect?"

"I don't know what you mean," Vera says, shrinking from him in sudden terror, "I don't know who you are."

"Ask pardon, miss, for troubling you. Won't ask any more questions. I'm Daggit, miss, as your sister employed to look up that precious husband of hers, and that singing hussy—ask pardon. And I *have* looked him up, and I mean to keep on looking him up, and see daylight if I'm shot for it!"

That is the last of Mr. Daggit. Vera sees him no more, and forgets him in a moment. For the metallic case incloses the rosewood casket—she is taking her last look at the dead face, her last kiss of the dead lips, the last farewell of the sister she loves. This side of eternity they will meet no more.

"Oh, my love! my love!" she cries out wildly, struck with sudden horror and panic. Some one comes at that frightened, helpless cry, and puts his arms about her before them all, and holds her.

"Vera, my own love," says a voice she knows well. "Vera, my dear, my dear!" And she clings to him and hides her face on his shoulder, quivering all over, while the case is screwed down, and the dead woman taken away. In these sublimated moments we forget ourselves and the world outside of us, but never for long. He lets her go, consigning her to the care of Harriet, who looks on, tearful but approving, and goes with the rest. And Mrs. Grundy does not say much—considering she has known him so long, and been

always attached to him, and the occasion and everything. And he is a splendid fellow! the ladies declare in an irrelevant burst. On the whole, some of them would not mind it themselves.

They lay Theodora Lightwood Fanshawe in the Charlton vault, where John and Robert Charlton already lie, and go and leave her. She is dead and buried. The interest centres in Colonel Ffrench now. Things look badly for him—very badly. Murmurs are rising, swelling, growing louder. He is the heir, the only one to benefit by her death, he was there that night, no one knows why; he spent it in the grounds, by his own showing. He and Mrs. Fanshawe were not good friends—it looks badly. If he was a poor man he would not be let off scot-free in this way; he would not be at large with a cloud of robbery and sudden death upon him. The rumor grows and grows, louder and more threatening, and reaches Charlton. It reaches Harriet, and Harriet carries it to Vera. The end will be that Colonel Ffrench, before a week, will lie in prison.

Two days have passed since the funeral; it is the afternoon of the third. Colonel Ffrench sits in his room alone, at the St. Ann's Hotel. No public demonstration has yet been made, but no one sees the gathering storm more clearly than he. He is strongly suspected, he cannot clear himself; before another day a warrant may be out for his arrest; he may be lodged in the town jail. The first shock is over, and he has braced himself to face his fate, to meet the blow. What must be, must be—he is a fatalist, more or less—if it is written, it is written. Of course, he will do what he can, but the prospect looks gloomy. He must resign his commission, inform his friends, put his affairs in order, leave Charlton Place in the care of the lawyers and of Vera, and fight for what is dearer to him than life—his honor. Will Vera believe him guilty? That thought is the hardest to bear of all.

It is a gusty, overcast evening, almost the last of the month. A fire burns in the grate, the last yellow glimmer of the frosty fall sunshine steals in and lights his writing-table. He is busily writing letters, making the most of the dying daylight, when there is a tap at the door.

"Come in," he says, without looking up.

Some one comes in, and stands silent, some of the hotel people, of course.

"What is it?" he asks, without turning round.

There is a rustle of woman's garments. He turns quickly; a long, black, vailed figure stands before him—a ghost in crape and bombazine. But despite the heavy crape vail he knows her.

"Vera!" he says, and rises in vast amaze.

She throws back her vail and lays hold of the table as if she needed support. She is paler than he has ever seen her—pale to the lips—and her eyes shrink and fall before his.

"Sit down," he says, and places a chair; "how ill you look! You are not fit to stand."

She stands, however, and makes a motion to speak. She is greatly, strongly agitated, that he can see. Once, twice, she essays before the words will come.

"I have heard—that you are—suspected of—of what has been done. I have come to say that—that I am sorry."

It is with the utmost difficulty she says this much. Some inward feeling moves her profoundly. But his whole face lights.

"Thank Heaven!" he says; "it is like you. You do not believe it—you *will* not believe it? say that."

"I do not—I will not—I never can."

"Thank Heaven!" he says, deeply moved; "it is like you—it is like you! I do not care half so much now. I *am* innocent, Vera, need I say it? When I left you I went straight to the summer-house—I was nearer you there than elsewhere. It was for the last time, and I stayed. Believe me guiltless,

and it will matter little who believes me guilty. Men have suffered unjustly before—I can bear it as well as they."

She makes a second effort, greater than the first. He wonders what it is she is going to say.

"I want to tell you—I have come to tell you—that if——" a pause, "that if the announcement of our marriage will help you, I will announce it. I—I will stay with you—I will be your wife."

The last word is a positive gasp. No words can tell the effort it costs her to say this. She turns from him as she does say it, and walks suddenly to one of the windows. It is not alone the offer itself, hard as it is to make—it is the construction he may put upon it. As the sister of the rich Mrs. Fanshawe, only a week ago she rejected with scorn and pride the offer of being his wife. As the impoverished sister of the dead Mrs. Fanshawe she comes to him—the heir—and renews the offer herself. How hard she has found it to come—to say this—only Vera's proud and sensitive heart can ever know. Let him misunderstand, if he will—it is all a misunderstanding from first to last. She will make it if she dies in the effort to say the words. But he does not misunderstand, he is unutterably touched—moved to the very depths of his soul.

"What shall I say?" he answers, brokenly. "I cannot thank you, I have no words. It is like you—I say that again—to come to me in the darkest hour of my life, and offer me the sacrifice of yours. But I cannot accept it. The name I give you must be a clean one, the hand I offer free from all suspicion of crime. I would, indeed, be a dastard if I accepted your heroism to help myself. I would not accept it if it *could* help me—but it cannot. Nothing now but the discovery of the real criminal can do that. For all the world I would not have it known that you are my wife now—the wife of a suspected thief. No, Vera, I love you with all my heart—a hundred-fold

better in this hour than ever before. And for that very love's sake I say *no*. If the day ever comes when I stand clear and free, I will go to you then, and——"

But she turns from the window as hastily as she has turned to it, and pulls her vail once more over her face.

"Say no more!" she exclaims; "let me go! It is so warm here—I am faint——" The words die away, but she rallies in a moment, and pushes aside the hand he holds out. "I am better—let me go!"

Something in her strained, unnatural tone checks the words he would speak. He goes down with her to the door, where Johnny and the phaeton wait. He helps her in, but she seems to shrink from his touch.

"Good-by," she says. "Drive fast, Johnny—it is nearly dark."

"Not good-by," he answers, cheerily; "good-night. I will see you early to-morrow. I have much to say."

"Drive fast, Johnny," is her sole reply.

She shivers, and draws her wrap closer about her. How dark it grows, how windy it is, how deathly chill!

He stands in the doorway until she is out of sight, then slowly and thoughtfully returns to his work with a new, glad hope stirring within him that all his gloomy prospects cannot darken. And Vera is driven rapidly home through the gusty gloaming, and ascends to her room. How still the house is, how empty, how lonely! How empty is the whole world! Every one seems to have died with Dot—life has come to an end. It is like a tomb—like the vault where they have laid her, these echoing, unoccupied rooms. Is it a sin to wish she were dead, too? What in all the weary world is there left to live for? She is tired out, her head aches—or is it her heart?—she feels numb and stricken, lost, forsaken, and full of pain. "Oh, me! oh, me!" she says, pitifully, and lays her folded arms down on the table, and her face upon them, with a long, sobbing sigh.

The wind cries like a banshee about the gables, the trees rattle stripped, bleak arms, the night falls cold and starless. And still Vera lies there long after the last light has faded, her head on her arms, as if she never cared to lift it again.

CHAPTER XIV.

TRACKED.

IT is not quite ten the following morning when Colonel Ffrench presents himself at Charlton. Harriet is the first person he encounters, and Harriet is struck by the bright eagerness of his face, the happy gladness of his smile. He is more like the Captain Dick of six years ago than she has seen him yet, but for some reason the change strikes her as out of place, and she frowns it down resentfully.

"Where is Miss Vera?" he asks. "Just tell her I am here, Harriet, will you, and particularly desire to see her."

Harriet's brow lowers a little more, and she does not stir. He looks at her in surprise.

"Is she not up?" he asks.

Harriet does not answer.

"Surely," he says, and comes suddenly nearer, "surely she is not ill?"

Still Miss Hart maintains gloomy silence. In real alarm he speaks for the third time.

"For Heaven's sake, Harriet, what is the matter? Why don't you speak? I wish to see my—my wife. Where is she?"

Harriet's sealed lips slowly and grimly unclose. She may

answer now—her dismal reticence has effectually banished all the buoyancy from her visitor's look and manner.

"Ay," she says, "where is she? that is what I would like to know. Your wife! You've come to it at last, have you? It's time, too, after six years."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Miss Vera's gone—*gone*—went away this morning at half-past six. Johnny drove her to the station, and where she's went, or what she's goin' to do, the Lord knows, I don't."

He falls back a step—the surprise, the blow, literally hold him dumb.

"She's left a'most all her things—her fine dresses, heaps and heaps of 'em upstairs, and took nothin' but her mournin'. All her jewels and that she sent to the bank yesterday. One trunk's all she's fetched, and not the biggest nuther. You needn't ask me questions—I don't know nuthin'. She's gone up to York first—she's friends there, I reckon—more'n she's got here, from all I can see."

Harriet shoots this Parthian shaft at the culprit, standing pale, and startled, and silent before her, with a baleful glance. It is not that she likes Captain Dick less, but that she likes Miss Vera more.

"She's going to look for work when she gets settled in her mind," she goes on; "that's all I know, if you was to stand starin' at me there till crack o' doom. She went to see you yes'day afternoon—if you'd care to know, you'd orter asked her then. She'd no money, as you might a-knowed, now her sister's gone, poor thing, and *you've* got all. I never did think much o' men folk, at no time," said Harriet, bitterly; "and the more I see, the less I think."

With which she goes. Nothing more is to be got from her; no note, no message has been left. He hunts up Johnny, who corroborates the housekeeper's story. He has driven Miss Vera to the station, and seen her on board the train.

her trunk checked, and the ticket taken for New York. Beyond that he has nothing to tell.

The difference half an hour can make in a life! Colonel Ffrench walked over the road to Charlton, every pulse beating high with hope and expectation, full of intense longing to see Vera again—he walks over the road *from* Charlton full of consternation, regret, keen disappointment, and dread. Has his refusal to accept her offer, her generous sacrifice yesterday, given her offense? Has she again misunderstood him? Has she thought—good Heaven! *can* she think he does not want her? Where can she have gone? What does she mean to do? Work for her living? The thought is a blank terror to him. He has not the faintest idea as to who her friends in New York may be, or where he must look for her. Look for her, of course he must, if he is not arrested before he can do it. He strides over the ground full of passionate impatience and wrath with himself. What a stupid blunderer he is to have let her go as he did last evening, to have refused her noble offer in that abrupt way—the offer that it cost her so much to make. He has taken it for granted that she would continue on at Charlton—the idea of her leaving, of her working, is an idea that has never once occurred to him. Of course, she must be found, and at once; it will not be a difficult matter to trace her in the city.

He is close upon the hotel, when a man, a stranger, a short, commonplace-looking person, steps up to him and touches his hat.

"Ask pardon—Colonel Ffrench, if I ain't mistaken?"

"That is my name."

"Thanky. Could I have a few minutes' private conversation with you, colonel? It's important, and I shan't keep you long."

"My good fellow, no—not at present. I am in the deuse and all of a hurry. Come this afternoon—say at three. I cannot stop now."

"Ask pardon, but it's your own business, colonel--least wise, it's both our business at present. It's about this here little job over at Charlton."

Colonel Ffrench stops and stares at him

"Who are you?" he demands.

"Detective Daggit, of New York; down here on my own hook, and a purpose to get at the bottom of this here affair. I've a word or two I'd particularly like to say, if so be you're as much interested in this matter as most folks would be in your place."

"Come with me," says Colonel Ffrench, and leads the way to his room. Here he points out a chair to his visitor, and seats himself squarely in front of him.

"Now, then, Detective Daggit, what is it you have to say?"

"Thanky, colonel," says polite Mr. Daggit, wiping his already very dry mouth with his hand: "first of all there's a reward out—offered by you—for the apprehension of the Charlton burglar. A handsome sum—five thousand dollars."

Colonel Ffrench nods.

"Very well—I mean to earn that money, and I don't think it's goin' to be sech a tough job nuther. I've been employed by the late lamented party this some time back to keep an eye on her husband—a very nice gentleman, indeed, but a little wild or so, about ladies and such; and when it came out about this here robbery, I tackled the job at once. Now, colonel, there's them as suspect *you*—ask pardon—but it's like folks to do it. You being next heir and that, and if you attempt to leave this here little town you'll be arrested—ask pardon—it ain't a pleasant thing to say, but you will."

"I know it," Colonel Ffrench says, sententiously.

"Then what you'd better do, colonel, is to lay by here a bit and wait, and hand the matter over to me. I've ferreted out gentlemen of this kidney before, and I'll do it again, or my name's not Daggit. I'll lay you a fifty that I have this fellow safely under my thumb before another fortnight."

Colonel Ffrench looks at him keenly.

"You suspect——" he begins.

"Never mind who I suspect just now. I'll make my suspicions sure before I name names. Just answer me a few questions first, then I'll take myself off."

He pulls out a note-book and pencil, and proceeds to propound sundry questions. They have little bearing on the case in hand, so far as Colonel Ffrench can see, but he answers them. Mr. Daggit is rising to go when a visitor is announced. He enters and proves to be Daddy. Instantly Mr. Daggit's bright eyes bore two holes through *him*.

"I've been to Shaddeck Light, Cap'n Dick," says the softy, shifting from one foot to the other in his usual way. "I was here last evenin' to see you, but you was eout. Somebody's been a stoppin' at Shaddeck, and forgot suthin', and I fetched it right along to you."

He produces, after much fumbling, a little flat package, wrapped in a piece of newspaper. Detective Daggit waits and watches with keen professional interest.

"Why do you bring it to me?" asks Colonel Ffrench.

Daddy does not know why; he shifts from foot to foot, and gapes vacantly at the ceiling. He found 'em and he brought 'em; he don't know why; they might belong to Cap'n Dick, mebbe—nobody else goes thar. He found 'em yes'day; the pieces o' paper blowed inter the rocks, the picter on the floor of Cap'n Dick's room. Thought they might be his'n' and so—he stops. Colonel Ffrench has uttered a sharp exclamation of surprise.

"Miss Charlton!" he exclaims.

He has opened the flat package, and finds a card photograph and two or three scraps of a letter. It is the photograph of a lady; it is the face of Eleanor Charlton. Detective Daggit pounces upon it, and looks at it over his shoulder.

"An uncommon good-looking young woman," he says "Ask pardon, but you know her, colonel?"

"Know her? Yes," Colonel French answers dreamily.

Eleanor Charlton's picture and true! He looks at it again; she has changed; the hair is dressed differently, she looks older, graver, more careworn, he fancies, than as he remembers her. He looks at the back; there is the photographer's name and the place—New Orleans—and a date in pencil.

"Why, it was only taken two months ago," he says, in surprise.

He looks at the torn scraps of writing; they have been wet, and are blotted. They are fragments of a letter, but contain little that is legible. There is a name, however, on one: "Yours ever—yours always—ERNEST."

"Jest step back, young man," says Detective Daggit, briskly, to Daddy; "you're a treasure, my lad, that's what you are. Now, Colonel Ffrench—ask pardon for bothering you in this way, but I must ask a few more questions. Tell me all you know about this here pretty young lady. It's the clew I've wanted, as sure as I'm Daggit."

Colonel Ffrench tells him. How Eleanor Charlton came from New Orleans six years before, and remained a few weeks with her mother. This photograph does not belong to him; he has never seen her, nor heard of her for the past four years. Then she was in Europe, traveling with a lady. It is not much he has to tell, but Mr. Daggit asks a number of adroit questions, again apparently wide of the mark. Now and then Mr. Fanshawe's name crops up, but in an off-hand sort of way. At length he rises, satisfied, and puts up his book.

"I'll take that picter, and these pieces of paper," he says, "and I'll go with you, young man, to Shaddeck Light, and have a look around. I've no doubt, from what you say, the burglar took a walk there after he'd done the job, and kept dark there all next day. He's dropped the picter in pulling out his handkerchief or watch, and he's tore up the

letter, and the wind's blowed these scraps back. That's how."

"Do you mean to say you connect the finding of this photograph in any way with——"

"Yes, I do. I'll not tell you why, so you needn't ask. It isn't goin' to be a hard job—not half so tough as if a professional cracksman was in it. Lord! these amateurs are tripped up as easy as nothin' at all. Good-day, colonel; jest you keep quiet here until you hear from me again. I'm off this afternoon, but before I go, I'll drop a hint in a quarter I know of, and there won't be any warrant got out. I've my eye on the right man, and I'll have my hand on him before you're two weeks older. And once I've got him," cries Detective Daggit, his light eyes flashing out, his wiry fists clenching, "I'll hold him while he has a body to kick or a soul to d——! Now, Daddy—rum name, Daddy—let's go and get a boat."

So Detective Daggit departs, and goes to work with a will. He visits Shaddeck Light, and inspects every cranny and corner. He visits Charlton Place, and investigates the late Mrs. Fanshawe's bedroom minutely. He even spends half an hour in Mr. Fanshawe's apartments. His face beams as he bids Harriet good-day and receives her parting glare as a benediction.

Colonel Ffrench, remaining behind with what patience he may, is compelled perforce to give up the pursuit of Vera. But a week or two can make little matter; she will not leave New York so soon. Even if he found her, as things stand, what is there he can say that she will listen to? His hands and tongue are tied until the Charlton criminal is discovered. He will wait as patiently as may be, and trust in Providence and Detective Daggit.

The first week brings him a note. D. D. is on the track; his bird is in New York; he has caught him sure, but doesn't mean to lay hands on him just yet. He is going South—to New Orleans; D. D. means to go, too.

Colonel Ffrench waits in feverish impatience for a second dispatch. The restraint, the surprise are unendurable. His longing to see Vera is becoming more than he can bear. People still whisper, but not so loudly; it is understood that the real burglar is found, or on the eve of being found, and that the Cuban Colonel is simply waiting here until that discovery can be officially announced. The close of the second week—the middle of the third comes, and brings no letter. It does better, however; it brings Detective Daggit himself, tired, travel-stained, dusty, but triumphant.

"I only waited a minute to order up a nip of brandy in the bar" he says. "You expected a letter, didn't you? I didn't write—writin' never does no good—I came. I've got my man, as safe, and sure, and sound as I've got *this!*"

He lays hold of the brandy and water brought by the attendant, and tosses it off exultingly. Colonel Ffrench leans forward pale with excitement, and waits.

"'Twas him—the one I had my eye on from the first. Oh! he's a precious lot, he is! When he left the house with the jewels, he took the shore road, and walked out to the rum little shanty you call Shaddeck Light. There he stayed in hiding all next day, and there he dropped the picter and tore up the letter. His given name's Ernest—sweet, pretty name for a burglar, ain't it? At dark he crosses to land, walks to St. Ann's, takes the first boat he finds (one was picked up adrift a day or two after, you remember), and rows himself to Greenport. There he got aboard the cars, and went to New York. He stayed there a day, hid the spoils, and came straight back."

"Back!"

"Straight back—straight as a die—to this place. Was at the funeral, and everything, as large as life. The morning after the funeral he left again, this time for good, taking all his traps with him—a cozy lot. No, don't ask questions—wait awhile. He went up to New York, and the first thing

he did was to shave off his whiskers—splendid whiskers—all the ladies loved 'em! 'Twas an uncommon pity, but they had to go. I was there at the time, havin' my hair cut, and I got a lock. I reckon when the trial comes on, 'twill fit that other little lock the coroner has. Then he went South."

Mr. Daggit is thirsty, and takes another pull at the brandy and water. Colonel Ffrench waits, silently but excitedly.

"There he sold some of the jewels—taking them out of the setting, of course—some in Baltimore, some in Washington, and so on until he got to New Orleans. Then he went to see the young lady—Miss Charlton. She's principal of a school there, very high-toned, and fashionable, and all that. There, too, he changed his name. What does he call himself? Why, Mr. Ernest Dane."

Ernest Dane! Colonel Ffrench knits his brows. Ernest Dane! Where has he heard that name before?

"Sounds familiar, does it? Well, it seems he's a very old lover of this Miss Charlton—been keepin' company for seven years, and in a few weeks they're to be married. There he is still, and there he'll stay until we get back, for I want you to come with me this time. You'll like to be in at the death, besides being a friend of the young lady's, and being on the spot to break it to her easy. He's all safe—no fear of that—watched night and day, and hasn't an idee any one suspects. Lord! it's as neat a job as ever was done, and as easy."

"But *who* is he?" Colonel Ffrench asks; "you have not told me that. An old lover of Miss Charlton's, and about to be married to her! Why, this is horrible! Who is the fellow?"

"He calls himself Ernest Dane now, and I reckon it's his name fast enough, though he had another tacked to it when he was here. Who is he?" Detective Daggit strikes the table a blow that makes the brandy and water jump. "It's Mr. Ernest Dane Fanshawe! It's the dead woman's own husband, by the eternal jingo!"

CHAPTER XV.

TRAPPED.

AN old-fashioned, Moorish-looking mansion, not far from the Rue des Ursulines—a great wilderness of garden, where all luxuriant Southern flowers bloom and run riot in their own sweet superabundance; orange-trees, magnolias, golden rods, and roses, everywhere roses. A high wall shuts it in—high gates shut the world out. It is a young ladies' seminary, Miss Eleanor Charlton, principal.

It is late in the afternoon of a lovely October day. The *pensionnat* is very still; the young ladies are at study; the jingle of two or three pianos alone breaks the silence. In her sitting-room Miss Charlton is alone, busily writing. The bowed head, the stately figure, the deep, sweet, serious eyes are those of the Eleanor Charlton of six and a half years ago There is hardly any perceptible change. She hardly looks older; she certainly looks happier. She is dressed in black silk, a touch of fine lace and a knot of crimson silk at the throat—fair, and gracious, and good, and a gentlewoman to her finger-tips. She looks a strong and self-reliant woman sitting here, brave as well as gentle, sufficient unto herself, one who has, unaided, made a niche for herself in the world, and fits it well. She has the look of one who need not merge and lose her own individuality in that of any man. But it is not so. Despite her nine and twenty years, her amiable self-poise and reliance, her well-established and popular school, Miss Charlton is about to go the way of all womankind, gentle and simple, learned and unlettered, and be married. It is a very old affair; more than seven years have

passed since she and Ernest Dane first met. He is not at all the sort of a man any one would imagine a woman of Eleanor Charlton's stamp—earnest-hearted, pure-souled, falling in love with. In no way is he her equal, in no way worthy of her, but the fact remains, she loves him. For over six years they have been apart. Fate, with a strong hand, has held them asunder; but through it all, through time, absence, silence, doubt, she has loved him, hoped in him, waited for him. And at last, Fate, conquered by fidelity, has brought them together. He has urged an immediate marriage, and she has consented. In two weeks she will be his wife.

Some one taps at the door. It is a black boy with a card. Miss Charlton looks up from her writing, and glances at it. A look of surprise, then of gladness, lights her face.

"Colonel Ffrench!" she exclaims—"what a pleasant surprise. Show the gentleman into the reception-room, and tell him I will be there in a moment."

She rises, and with the womanly instinct that never fails, goes first to the glass. But the shining coils of silken chestnut hair are smooth; lace, bow, cuffs, all are in order; so she shakes out her dark skirts and goes to meet her guest. She has never seen him, and but very indirectly heard of him, since that long past summer. It is with very genuine pleasure she goes to meet him now.

He rises at her entrance. How distinguished, how fine-looking, how soldierly he is! is her first, instinctive, feminine thought—and yet so exceedingly like the Captain Dick of old. She comes forward and holds out her hand, with the smile he remembers.

"Colonel Ffrench! How very, very glad I am! What a great and delightful surprise!"

He does not answer, although in look and warm hand-pressure his greeting is cordial enough. But—it is a curious

fancy—he absolutely looks embarrassed as they both sit down.

"I scarcely dared hope," she says, "we would ever meet again. What a wanderer you have become—now in Central America—now in Cuba—now in Europe. And such a Paladin, too! I have heard it all, you see. It agrees with you, I think, the wandering and the fighting. You are looking wonderfully well."

"That is a compliment I can honestly return. Do you know where I came from last?"

"Yes," she answers, and her tone is grave and sad. "I saw it all in the papers. You were at Charlton when poor Dora Lightwood died. Poor, bright little Dora! Has the burglar yet been found?"

He looks at her gravely, with something, oddly enough, like compassion in the gray darkness of his eyes.

"Yes," he says, "I believe he has."

That odd look makes her regard him questioningly; but he says no name. There is a pause.

"And Vera?" she says, with some hesitation—"how does she bear it?"

"I can hardly answer that question," he responds slowly. "Vera has left Charlton, and is at present, I believe, with some friends in New York. Naturally, it has been a terrible blow to her; no sisters ever were more attached."

"Dear little Vera! what a bright, joyous, frank little fairy she was! She has become a brilliant society belle since, I have heard; but under it all, I am sure, the same true, brave heart beats. I should like, I should greatly like, to see her."

"I think I may promise that much in Vera's name," he says; "she will come to see you soon."

That fleeting look, as if of pity for her, is in his eyes again. What does it mean?—or is it only her fancy? She takes

her courage in both hands, and looks at him, a smile in the fawn eyes, a flush on the delicate cheek.

"Colonel Ffrench, do tell me—I am dying to know—are you really married to Vera?"

"I am married to Vera, and have been for over six years."

Here is silence. The wistful, hazel eyes linger on his face, and ask the questions her lips cannot frame.

"All that is too long a story for to-day," he says, with a smile. "Vera shall tell you everything when you meet. Now let me ask a question in turn, and do not think me impertinent. *You* are about to be married?"

"Yes," she answers, frankly, but flushing.

"To Mr. Ernest Dane?"

"To Ernest Dane. Do you know him, Colonel Ffrench?

"I—think so. I am not sure. I fancy it was he who called upon me once at Shaddeck Light, the very afternoon of your arrival at Charlton. He was at St. Ann's that week, was he not?"

"Yes," she answers, embarrassed; "he was there. But it is curious he has never spoken of knowing *you*. I was engaged to him even then," she says, in a very low voice.

She is thinking, and so, perhaps, is he, that but for that engagement she might long ago have been Richard Ffrench's wife.

"We were poor," she goes on, simply; "he did not seem to succeed very well at that time, and my poor mother was greatly opposed to him. So our engagement was a strict secret. He visited me once—one evening at Charlton, and from that night until a fortnight ago we never met. He has been in business out West, and working hard, poor fellow. I have been, as you may have heard, traveling with an invalid lady pretty nearly all over Europe. It is owing to her generous liberality that this place and this school are mine—that I am I hope, securely established for life. At intervals

Ernest and I have corresponded, but at long intervals and very irregularly. Now he has secured, not wealth but a competence, and he has come to claim me. In two weeks we are to be married. You will stay and be present, will you not, my friend, and—if it may be—bring Vera?"

Before he can reply, the black boy reappears, and ushers in a visitor, Mr. Ernest Dane.

"I am so glad!" Eleanor says, rising quietly, her whole face lighting. "Now you will meet. Ernest," she passes Colonel Ffrench, and goes forward gladly to meet her lover, "there is a very old friend here who thinks he has met you before. Colonel Ffrench, Mr. Dane."

Colonel Ffrench rises, his dark brow bent, his gray, resolute eyes stern, his lips set, and stands soldierly, inflexible, commanding, confronting the face he knows. But *is* it the man he seeks? the slayer of his wife, the midnight thief, the cowardly robber of a woman? Where are all the long, blonde, Dundreary whiskers, and can their loss alone make such a change in a countenance? How weak is that womanish face, now that its hirsute disguise is gone, and what an excellent thing is a beard to hide a weak mouth and a fool's chin.

"I was not mistaken," says Colonel Ffrench's deep tones. "I have met Mr. —— Dane before."

Mr. Dane is deadly pale—is frightfully pale. His blue eyes shift and fall from the strong, stern, relentless gray ones—the irresolute lips tremble. Mr. Dane is horribly frightened, and shows it.

"I—I think not. I—I think there must be some mistake. I have never met Colonel Ffrench before."

"Your memory fails, Mr. Dane—we *have* met," says Colonel Ffrench, keeping his relentless gaze immovably fixed upon him. "Call to mind—if you can—an afternoon, over six years ago, when you honored me by a visit in my den—Shaddeck Light."

Mr. Dane, still white to the lips, makes the effort, and manages to recall it. But his pallor is so great, his alarm so apparent, his embarrassment so intense and real, that Eleanor looks from one to the other, in sudden terror and dismay. Before she can speak, Colonel Ffrench rises.

"I will call to-morrow," he says, and once again that profoundly pitying look is in his eyes. "I leave New Orleans in the afternoon, but I will call and see you before I go."

He departs. As the street-door closes behind him, a man looks out stealthily from behind some espaliers.

"Well, colonel, what d'ye think?" a voice asks.

"It is all right, Daggit, you have your man. He will give you no trouble. Do not approach him until he is well away from the house. The lady must not be alarmed."

He goes, and Detective Daggit resumes his watch. It is a long one. The sun sets, the night falls, the moon rises long before Mr. Ernest Dane quits the house.

But he comes at last, walking rapidly, looking about him nervously, and still startlingly pale. Mr. Daggit follows with the tread of a cat, shod at once with the shoes of silence and swiftness. A square or two is passed, the seminary is out of sight, then at the corner of a quiet street Detective Daggit lays his hand on the shoulder of Mr. Ernest Dane; lays it so suddenly, so sharply, with so strong and steely a clasp, that it extorts a cry from the startled man.

"None o' that," says Mr. Detective Daggit; "it'll not do a mite of good, and will only raise a crowd, which would be unpleasant, I should think, to a gentleman of your fine feelin's. None o' that, either!" as Mr. Dane instinctively strikes out to wrench himself free. "I'm the strongest man of the two, and if you *do* do it, why I've a seven-shooter here, and by the Lord above! I'll shoot you like a mad dog before you get round the corner."

"What do you mean? Who are you? Why is this outrage?" demands Mr. Ernest Dane. The moonlight, the

white, piercing, brilliant Southern moonlight, is full on his face, and dead and in his coffin, it will never be whiter His voice chokes and breaks as he speaks—a coward Mr. Dane is, to the depths of his white-livered soul.

"What do I mean?" repeats Detective Daggit; "why, I mean you're my prisoner? Who am I? Why, I'm Detective Daggit of New York. Why is this outrage? Why, because you've robbed and killed your wife, and we're going to see what an enlightened jury of free-born fellow-citizens will say about it, Mr. Ernest Dane Fanshawe!"

He makes a sudden desperate break and frees himself, but, before he has run ten steps, the fingers of steel clutch his collar again, and the cold muzzle of a revolver is at his temple.

"You would, would you?" says Mr. Detective Daggit. "You'd give me the slip after all the trouble I've had running after you, would you? Hi, there! McFarlan!" A second man appears, as if by magic. "On with the brace-'ets! Safe bind, safe find—and there's a little matter of five thousand dollars at stake. Ask pardon, Mr. Fanshawe—click! that's on—now the other—click again! Lo! that's what I call lovely and comfortable—now we can jog on together in peace. Take the other side, Mac. I hope you don't find 'em too tight, Mr. Fanshawe? I wouldn't hurt your wrists on any account."

Handcuffed, and between his captors—white as death, he walks on, livid terror on every feature of his ghastly face.

"Ask pardon for being so rude and sudden like, but you'll have to postpone that wedding of yours a few years, Mr. Ernest Dane Fanshawe. Ain't it uncommon soon, too—only three weeks since your first was buried! It was neatly done, Mr. Fanshawe—wait a minute! don't interrupt—your counsel will tell the jury all about your innocence by and by. You stole in about the middle of the night—wait a minute, I say—and hid in a closet in your wife's

room. As soon as she was asleep you stole out, pocketed the jewels, and in some way woke her up. She struggled with you—wait a minute, can't you!—tore off the crape, pulled a handful from your whiskers—beautiful whiskers, Mr. Fanshawe—I wonder at you for shavin' 'em off. You broke away, got out, and made straight for Shaddeck Light. You dropped a few little things there, but never mind, I'll let you have the picture again when sentence is passed. It'll be a comfort to you, mebbe, up in Sing Sing or Auburn. And you come back for the funeral! Now *that's* what I call showin' the highest-toned sort of feelin' and respect for the dead, and all that, and very well you looked, Mr. Fanshawe, in your mournin' clothes. And then you come down here and make love to the school-marm—oh! darn it, wait a minute!—and are goin' to marry her, too, in a fortnight in the most honorable manner. I've seen a good many sharp games in my time, and met a good many sharp cards, but if ever I met a sharper, or see a sharper, then I'm everlastin'ly darned! But others is sharp, too, and Joe Daggit's one of 'em, though he says it as hadn't ought to. And I've got you, my buck, and I mean to keep you, and I've got the five thousand reward, and I mean to keep *that!* And we'll send you up for half a dozen of years at hard labor, by the living Lord!"

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As Mr. Ernest Dane Fanshawe passes with Detective Daggit on this moonlight night forever from this story, it may be mentioned here that Mr. Daggit was among the prophets, and that at this moment Mr. Fanshawe, the elegant, the languid, the handsome, the super-refined, is doing the State some service in the pleasant rural village of Sing Sing. No doubt you read the trial—it produced a great sensation, and is still fresh in your memory. The reason of Mr. Dane's change of name came out with many other interesting items of that gentleman's dashing career. It was the name of a

maternal grandparent, who had left him the legacy which took him to Europe, and he had assumed it simply to escape disagreeable duns. He has learned a useful trade—shoemaking, it is understood—and has had the widespread sympathy of all the young ladies in the country. He was *so* handsome, poor fellow, and *so* interesting, and it was *such* a pity to sentence him for six years' imprisonment to hard labor for simply taking his own wife's jewels.

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For Eleanor. Well, there are simply some things that cannot be told, some griefs that mere words are powerless to paint. So far as this world's hopes are concerned, her life came to an end in the hour when Richard Ffrench, unutterably distressed, broke to her the news. But she will live and go on with her life-work, bravely, nobly, to the end, the true woman Heaven has made her, with steadfast eyes fixed on that other world, "the world that sets this right."

CHAPTER XVI.

SHADDECK LIGHT.

A GUSTY November day. Dead leaves swirl in wild brown drifts through the streets of St. Ann's before the wind, a wind that buffets, and tosses, and shouts like the lusty young giant it is, that wrenches and twists the tree-tops, that rattles the sundry vine-stalks which a few months ago hung heavy with great drooping clusters of roses, that flings dust by the handful into the eyes of the unwary, and then whooping in gusty glee, flies off to Shaddeck Bay.

It is the middle of the afternoon when Richard Ffrench

turns out of the great elm avenue of Charlton Place, and prepares for a windy walk to town. He only came yesterday and departs again this evening. His work is done, his name is cleared, the real culprit lies in prison—Fate itself cannot hold him and his wife apart longer. Never has *debonair* Captain Dick, in the brightest, most spirited, most sanguine days of his youth, looked more hopeful, more buoyantly happy than does the ex-cavalry colonel to-day. He is going for Vera; no misunderstanding, no foolish scruple shall keep them asunder longer. She has all the pride of —a fallen angel where *he* is concerned, but love shall triumph over pride, and in his heart he knows as well as he lives that Vera cares for him yet. So—free, cleared, triumphant, rich, loving, hopeful—he gets over the ground at his usual swinging pace, whistling cheerily as he goes, "My love is but a lassie yet." He has discovered this much: when Vera left Charlton she went direct to her old friend, Mrs. Trafton, and has remained with her ever since. Before this time to-morrow he will be at Mrs. Trafton's door to claim his own, through life and beyond death if he may.

How it blows! and how the great stripped trees wrestle with the blast in a fierce embrace! He bends his powerful figure before it, as it comes swooping down upon him, flinging spiteful siroccos of dust in his eyes, and sending the blood bounding through every strong vein. His spirits, already high, rise higher as it buffets him. It is like strong wine, this exhilarating autumn gale, with the saltness of the sea, the fragrance of the pine woods in its breath at once.

The tide is out, as he turns into the shore road, the long black bar is bare that leads to Shaddeck Light, and crossing it he sees Daddy. The old den looks battered, wind-blown, weather-beaten and tumble-down. He has half a mind to cross over, and take a look at it before he goes—he has not been there for many a year. As he approaches Daddy espies him, and comes to a halt.

"Hallo!" cheerily says Colonel Ffrench.

"Hallo!" Daddy stolidly returns; and then Daddy stands on the other foot and eyes his master. "Yer ain't seen her, hev yer? Yer don't know she's here, do yer?" he vaguely inquires.

"Seen her? What her?"

"Yer didn't hear she'd come back, did yer? Said so herself. Told me not to tell nuther. A-goin' back in the keers to-night. Come to take a look. She's thar yet."

Daddy jerks his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the ocean. But Colonel Ffrench begins to understand. His dark face flushes and lights.

"Are you speaking of Miss Vera?" he asks.

"Ah!" says Daddy, nodding—"her. She's thar yit. Come to take a last look at the dear old place. That's what *she* said. Blessed if he ain't gone!" says Daddy, as his master turns from him, and in a minute is crossing the bar. A dim perception of the truth stirs vaguely in the fog of Daddy's mind. "Blessed if he ain't goin' ter her! Blessed if he ain't sweet on her!" says Daddy to himself, as he lumbers heavily away.

She is sitting on the little sea-wall, her fingers locked together, her hands lying listlessly on her black lap. Her long crape vail is thrown back; the clear face is like a star set in jet. The great, dark eyes, the loveliest the wide earth holds, this man thinks, have all the sadness of farewell in their depths. She hears his footsteps, and turns; then rises and stands, pale, startled, surprised, before him. But a light comes into her eyes—the quick light of irrepressible gladness and welcome. And he sees it.

"Vera!" he exclaims, and holds out both hands.

"Captain Dick!" she answers, and gives him hers. The name, the look, the manner, have swept away six long years, and it is the Captain Dick of Charlton days, her hero, that is here. It is but for an instant; then she laughs faintly, and draws away her hands.

"I thought for a moment I was a little girl again. You looked so like the Captain Dick of those far-off days. But I thought you were in New York."

"And I thought *you* were in New York."

He seats himself beside her, on the stone wall, and looks with loving, longing, happy eyes into her half shrinking face.

"I was in New York; I have been ever since I left——"

"Why did you leave?" he breaks in. "That was cruel, Vera. I went back early next morning, full of all I had to say, all one heart could hold—and you were gone!"

She looks away from him, and out to where the angry red of the sunset beams through gathering clouds.

"It was best I should go—it was inevitable, and Mrs. Trafton's house has ever been a second home. I went to her in my trouble and my loneliness, and she was good to me, better than I can say. Colonel Ffrench, I have read it all—the dreadful truth, that vindicates you, and condemns that wretched man. And I hardly think it surprised me, although it was a profound shock. For she loved him—oh! my dear little Dot! she loved him. I always knew him to be weak and wicked, but of this I feel sure—he never intended to go beyond the stealing of the jewels—he never intended to injure *her*."

"No, he came to steal, not to murder. If she had only not awakened. But why should you ever think of him?"

"I think of Eleanor, poor, noble, great-hearted Eleanor! She haunts me like a ghost. Some day I hope to see her."

"I have ventured to promise that much in your name," he says. "You will let me keep my word, will you not?"

"I shall see her, certainly," Vera answers. "In a week or two I start with Mrs. Trafton to spend the winter in Florida, and we shall take New Orleans on our way. She is falling into a decline, Mrs. Trafton, and has been ordered South. I go with her as companion. That is why I am here. I have come to take a last look at poor Dora's grave."

"And you think I will let you go?" he says. "Vera, turn round, look at me, instead of the sky and the water, and tell me, if you can, how long this is to go on. For six years you have been my wife, in name. In all that time we have been held apart, by my own act in the first years, by misunderstandings and mutual pride in these last. It is time all that should end. I love my wife, I want my wife, and I mean to have her. No," as she flashes upon him one of the old imperious glances, and tries to free her hands, "I am not to be annihilated even by the fire of *your* eyes, my Vera, eyes I have thought the most beautiful on earth, the truest, the dearest, ever since I saw them first. I know you cared for me a little once; I think you care for me a little still; I know that I love you with all the strength of my heart. In my trouble you came to me, you offered to stay with me, to be my wife. Vera, I claim that promise now—I claim *you*. I am going to Cuba in a week—not to rejoin the army. I have done with that, but political purposes, all the same. Vera, will you come with me to Cuba, instead of to Florida, with Mrs. Trafton?"

She looks up, and the dark, sweet eyes that meet his are full of tears.

"I will go with you to the end of the world," she answers.

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There has been a hiatus here, you understand. The wind shouts as if in derision at this pair of lovers, and the sea, dashing higher and higher over the rocks, sends its flaky spray in their faces.

"And it is not from any sense of duty, such as sent you to me at the hotel, but because——"

"Because I love you," says Vera, speaking the words for the first time in her life; "because I have loved you from the very first."

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The tide is rising; if this ecstatic pair linger much longer, they will have a chance to pass the night *tète-â-tète* on the sea-wall. The crimson and fiery orange of the strong sunset is paling rapidly before grayness of coming night and gathering storm. The wind still shrieks about them like a wind gone mad; sea-gulls whirl and whoop startlingly near; the flashing spray leaps higher and higher.

"The tide is rising," he says, "let us go. If we sit here longer we will have to stay here till morning, and one night you may think quite enough to spend at Shaddeck Light; although I shall look back to that night with the deepest gratitude, for to it I owe the happiness of my life."

He offers his hand and she takes it, and so, clinging to it, passes over the wet, weedy, slippery kelp and shingle to the shore. There, as by one impulse, both pause and look back. Before them lies the new life, behind, the old, and they linger for a second to bid it farewell.

One last yellow gleam of sunset breaks from behind the wind-blown clouds and lights palely the solitary little brown cot. Falling fast to decay, with broken windows, hanging doors, settling roof, it stands waiting for its death-blow, in forsaken and bleak old age—a desolate picture. While they look the light fades, swift darkness falls, and night and loneliness wrap Shaddeck Light.

THE END.

